



MISSISSIPPI BAPTISTS

*A History of Southern Baptists
in the Magnolia State*



by ROBERT C. ROGERS

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Based on the previous edition by Richard A. McLemore

Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

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Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

Editing by Erin Clyburn
Book design by Megan Young

To

All former MBHC Executive Directors,
who made sure our history was preserved.

Table of Contents

Foreward	9
Preface	11
Chapter 1: The Baptists Take Root	14
Chapter 2: The First Baptist Association of Mississippi	34
Chapter 3: The First Attempt at a State Convention	54
Chapter 4: The State Convention Survives Tough Times	67
Chapter 5: Antebellum Prosperity and Conflict	85
Chapter 6: Antebellum Mississippi Baptist Church Life	102
Chapter 7: The Civil War and Reconstruction	119
Chapter 8: The Last Years of the 19 th Century	141
Chapter 9: The Great Advances	164
Chapter 10: The Great Depression and World War II Era	185
Chapter 11: Religious Revival and Racial Revolution	209
Chapter 12: Convention Growth and the Conservative Resurgence	230

Chapter 13: Into the Twenty-First Century	259
Chapter 14: COVID-19 and Beyond	292
Appendix A: Salem Baptist Church Covenant and Articles of Faith	301
Appendix B: Articles of Faith, Rules, etc., of the Mississippi Baptist Association, 1807	304
Appendix C: Constitution of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi, 1836	309
Appendix D: Historical Table of the Mississippi Baptist Convention	312
Notes	318
Bibliography	354
Index	360

Foreward

This revised and updated history of Mississippi Baptists had its beginning approximately 15 years ago. It was the desire of Dr. Edward McMillan, former Executive Secretary of the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission, and Dr. Jim Futral, former Executive Director–Treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, to produce such a treatise, and they laid the groundwork for the present board of trustees of the commission to pursue the completion of that vision.

Dr. Shawn Parker, Executive Director–Treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, the appropriate convention committees, and the Board of the Historical Commission gave permission for this work to be completed, and Dr. Robert C. Rogers was chosen as the writer.

The readers of this volume will find a common thread of faith, dedication and perseverance that united early Mississippi Baptists. That same spirit has been woven into the fabric of each generation of Mississippi Baptists. Dr. Rogers has used the best of historical records and methodology to present an informative, inspiring, and accurate story of Mississippi Baptists through the generations. It is the desire of the MBHC that readers will be challenged to grow from the historical roots described in this book to ensure a bright and fruitful future.

Thanks to the MBHC staff: Emily Jones, Hannah Holley, Mary Margaret

Freeman, Jeremiah Tibbs and Nettie Schulte for all of their assistance in gathering materials, finding photographs, indexing and more. And a word of special commendation to our Assistant Director, Heather Moore, for leading this group, making all editing, design, printing and distribution arrangements, and working diligently to keep everyone on task and make sure that this book was a reality.

The Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission has accumulated a valuable collection of source material on Baptist life in Mississippi. Among these treasures is a complete collection of the minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, an extensive collection of the minutes of the associations, a near complete collection of The Baptist Record, and the minutes of more than 350 churches. All the materials in the Commission have been donated by the churches themselves or by private donors. To find out what materials we have for your church contact our office. If we do not have any materials on your church then we would love to work with you to preserve your church's history. Our offices are located in the Leland Speed Library on the campus of Mississippi College. You can contact us at mbhc@mc.edu or 601-925-3434.

Dr. Anthony Kay
Executive Director
Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission
October 2024

Preface

Mississippi has the highest concentration of Baptists of any state in America, yet more than a half-century has passed since the last history of Mississippi Baptists was published. During that time, Mississippi Baptists have been dramatically shaped by the Civil Rights Movement, theological controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention, and changes in technology and culture. That story needs to be told.

In 1980, I completed my doctoral dissertation on the social history of Baptists in antebellum Natchez, Mississippi. Since that time, it has been my dream to write a new history of Mississippi Baptists. After 33 years as a Southern Baptist pastor in Mississippi and Georgia, I returned to Mississippi in 2014, and I became a hospital chaplain and an online adjunct history professor for Baptist University of Florida. At that time, the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission (MBHC) was pursuing a vision of a newly revised and updated history. In November 2021, I signed a contract to write this book. I am grateful to God for His timing and for the opportunity to write this story.

Three other histories of Southern Baptists in Mississippi were previously published: *A Complete History of Mississippi Baptists* by Z. T. Leavell and T. J. Bailey in 1904, *A Popular History of the Baptists in Mississippi* by Jesse L. Boyd in 1930, and *A History of Mississippi Baptists* by Richard

A. McLemore in 1971. This book is primarily based on McLemore's history. However, this book has more new features than simply the addition of 50 years of history. I have included new research from the beginning. One example was the discovery of evidence that the mother church of Mississippi Baptists was Ebenezer Baptist Church, Florence, South Carolina. Some other new research included the declaration of religious liberty by Richard Curtis, Jr., the first Baptist pastor in Mississippi; social and cultural information on typical Baptist life during different time periods; trends in Baptist theology; and details of the previously untold story of the McCall controversy of 1948–49. Throughout the book, I sought to write in a narrative style, including anecdotes that reflected the flavor of Baptist life.

There are various Baptist denominations in Mississippi, but this book focuses on the story of Southern Baptists. The earliest Baptist churches, associations, and convention in the state remain affiliated with the SBC. This book tells how other Baptist groups, such as Primitive Baptists, Landmark Baptists, and Black Baptist groups like the General Missionary Baptist State Convention of Mississippi, separated from Southern Baptists. However, after explaining how these Baptist groups separated, this book no longer follows their history; rather, it continues to follow the Southern Baptist story in Mississippi. Chapters 9–14 each include a section that highlights Mississippians who were influential in the SBC during that time.

A history written about Mississippi cannot avoid the ugly story of slavery and racial oppression. Whenever positive accomplishments of enslavers, Confederate soldiers, and White leaders are described, in no way do I intend to negate the suffering of Black people who were enslaved and were victims of Jim Crow discrimination. I sought to deal with racism honestly but redemptively. I attempted to balance the negative history of racial sin with the positive story of repentance and racial reconciliation.

The reader will notice several recurring themes: racism, theology, controversy, and leadership. I encourage the reader to notice the gradual change from racism to racial equality. Notice the change from strict Calvinism to moderated Calvinism and back to Calvinism. Notice how controversies like Landmarkism and the conservative resurgence influenced theology and how Baptists learned to change their practices after the McCall controversy in the 1940s and after the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Pay attention to the impact of key leaders. Noticing these themes as

you read can teach you valuable lessons.

So many people were vital to the research and writing of this book. Heather Moore, Assistant Director of the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission, went out of her way to be helpful, directing me to the key documents and people that I needed for my research. She opened the archives to me on her day off, and on several occasions, she brought materials to me when she traveled to Hattiesburg. Her efforts saved me an enormous amount of time. She and Dr. Anthony Kay, Executive Director of the MBHC, read each chapter that I wrote and gave me valuable suggestions. Dr. Kay lent his historical insight to the overall project as he reviewed each chapter with me. Dr. Shawn Parker, Executive Director–Treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, supported the project from start to finish, and he helped enlist a professional editor, Erin Clyburn, to review the book and ensure the quality of the content. I am indebted to each of these people, as well as the board members of the MBHC and MBCB, for their support of this project. Whatever errors remain in this book are my own.

I need to give an explanatory note about place names: Whenever a Baptist church is named for the first time in a section of the book, I give the full name of the church, then the name of the town, if known, followed by the name of the county in parentheses. This should aid in locating churches named in the book. If a church or city outside of Mississippi is named, the name of the state is given; otherwise, it is assumed that the church or city is in Mississippi.

When my wife, Mary, heard about the opportunity to write this book, she said, “You should do it; history is your passion.” She patiently put up with several years of research and writing during weeknights and weekends, and she listened to my endless stories of historical discoveries. I could not have finished this book without her love and encouragement.

Robert C. (Bob) Rogers, Th.D.
Hattiesburg, Mississippi
June 2024

Chapter 1

The Baptists Take Root

1780 – 1798

Baptists have been the predominant religious faith in Mississippi for so long that nearly a century ago historian Jesse L. Boyd referred to Mississippi as a “Baptist empire.”¹ Today, it is difficult for Baptists in the Magnolia State to imagine a time when their spiritual ancestors were a minority faith that suffered hardship and persecution, but they did, even in Mississippi.

The earliest Baptists struggled for religious liberty. The story of the first Baptists in Mississippi is linked to this desire for a free faith. John Smyth fled persecution in England for being a Separatist Puritan, and in Amsterdam in 1609, he established the first English-speaking Baptist church.² Thomas Helwys founded the original Baptist church in England in London around 1611, but he landed in jail shortly thereafter for speaking out for religious freedom, and he died in prison. When he opposed the state church in Massachusetts, Roger Williams escaped to Rhode Island, where he started a new colony with complete religious liberty. Williams established the first Baptist church in America in Providence, Rhode Island, around 1638 or 1639. William Screven was banished from Maine for his Baptist faith, and he established the inaugural Baptist church in the South, in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1696.³ In 1780, Richard Curtis, Jr., moved with from South Carolina to the Natchez area, in the future territory of Mississippi. Although the Spanish rulers of Natchez only recog-

nized Roman Catholicism, in 1791 Curtis started the first Baptist church in Mississippi.⁴

The Mississippi Baptist story begins in South Carolina

The Baptists of South Carolina supplied the first Baptist settlers to Mississippi. Richard Curtis, Jr., was born on May 28, 1755. In 1780, he traveled with his parents and a group of fellow Baptists from the Pee Dee River Valley of South Carolina to settle on Coles Creek, which emptied into the Mississippi River, about 20 miles north of Natchez. The precise location in South Carolina where these Baptists came from is unclear. One theory seeks to connect Curtis and his fellow travelers to the historic Welsh Neck Baptist Church, Society Hill, in what is now in Darlington County, South Carolina.⁵ However, the church minutes of Welsh Neck from that time do not mention any of the Baptists who first settled in Mississippi.⁶ There is evidence of a connection to the area near Florence, South Carolina. Land records show that Richard Curtis, Sr., lived there on Lake Swamp of Lynches River.⁷ Additionally, Richard Curtis, Jr., had connections to five different men from Ebenezer Baptist Church, Florence, South Carolina, including the men who ordained him.⁸

The Revolutionary War period was one of great disturbance throughout South Carolina. There was a large group of Tories who were fanatical in their support of England, but an equally powerful and more numerous citizenry were American patriots. The conflict of these groups stifled the economic development of South Carolina and brought fear and frustration into many parts of the colony. More than 200 battles and skirmishes between American patriots and the British were fought in South Carolina alone. In 1774, Richard Curtis, Sr., along with two of his sons, Benjamin and William, and his stepson, John Jones, enlisted with the American forces of Francis Marion, nicknamed the “Swamp Fox.” They served in three campaigns against the British and were mustered out in 1779. By that time, British forces occupied Charleston. From this center, the British began a campaign to bring the colony under their control. Though they were eventually overcome by General Nathanael Greene and his forces, the turmoil and distress created by the war were undoubtedly a factor in encouraging

some South Carolinians to seek a more peaceful place to live.⁹

The Curtis family decided to establish their new homes in the Mississippi River Valley near Natchez, then a part of Spanish-controlled West Florida, which included the area that is now southern Mississippi, southern Alabama, and the Florida panhandle. After the French and Indian War in 1763, the British took Florida from Spain, and Englishmen from the colonies began to settle there. The stories of productive farmlands that were free to all settlers made the prospects of beginning again enticing. In 1779, Spain took advantage of the British distraction with the American Revolution and conquered the Natchez District, taking it from the British and adding it to West Florida. This change of rulers did not deter the Baptists from coming.

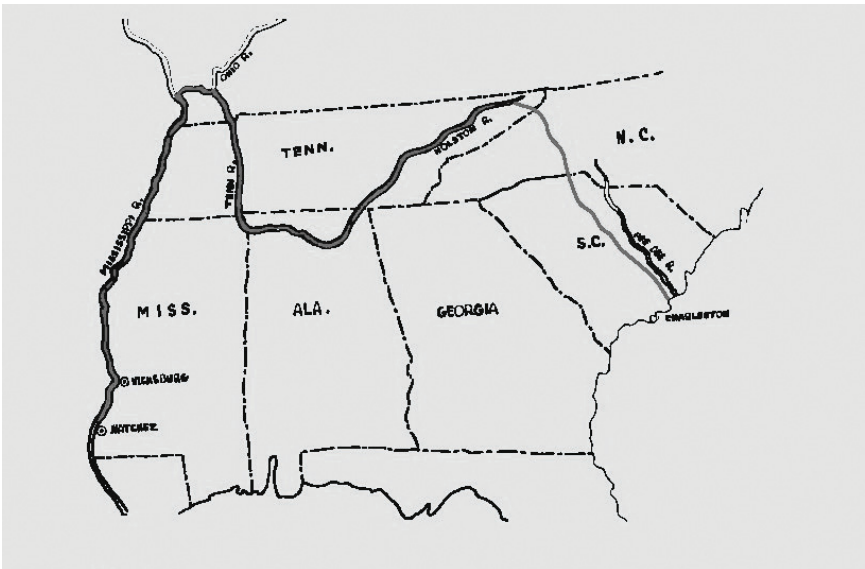
The Baptist pioneer trek from South Carolina to Mississippi

The route that settlers like the Curtis family followed to their new homes was a familiar one used by many who were a part of the great Westward Expansion, but it was not an easy trek. John Griffing Jones, a direct descendant of John Jones, wrote that the Curtis party left their homes in South Carolina in early 1780, their horses loaded with their clothes, furniture, and tools, and traveled north, crossing the Appalachian Mountains. Primitive trails, often first carved by American Indians, and mountainous terrain made the trip difficult. In early spring, they arrived on the banks of the Holston River near the present location of Kingsport, Tennessee, a trip of about 300 miles, and they immediately began the task of raising a crop of corn, hunting game to salt and preserve, and building flatboats for the river journey that lay ahead.¹⁰

In the fall of 1780, the travelers were ready to begin their voyage downriver. On the first boat were Richard Curtis, Sr., and his wife, Phoebe; their sons William and Benjamin and their wives; son Richard Curtis, Jr., and his wife, Patsy; daughters Hannah Curtis Courtney and Phoebe Curtis Stampley and their husbands; stepson John Jones, his wife, and son William; and others whose names are unknown. On the second boat were Daniel and William Ogden and their families, and a Mr. Perkins and his family. There was a third boat, but John Griffing Jones did not record the names of the occupants.

The band of Baptists knew from the experience of other travelers that they might encounter opposition from American Indian tribes, since they were planning to take and settle on lands occupied by the local tribes. By 1732, the French had killed or enslaved the Natchez tribe, and those left had taken refuge among other tribes. Tribes like the Choctaws were still in the area, and the party knew they would encounter others along the way. For this reason, settlers consistently traveled in large groups.¹¹

Their travel took them down the Holston River for 87 miles to what is now Knoxville. There, they entered the Tennessee River. The three boats had only traveled about 40 miles downriver when they met with the Cherokees, who had been allies of the British during the Revolution. The Cherokees attacked the flotilla on a bend in the Tennessee near the mouth of the Clinch River near present-day Kingston. The first flatboat, occupied by the Curtis and Jones families, was hit. Some of the women and children took over the oars while the men fired their rifles in defense. Hannah Courtney was grazed on the head by a ball, and Jonathan Curtis was slightly wounded on the wrist. While John Jones fired his rifle, his 12-year-old son worked the oars, and his wife held up a thick stool made of poplar wood as a shield. A bullet hit her stool, and later Mrs. Jones remarked that “their guns were very weak, as they did not make a very deep impression on the stool.” The second boat floated by unharmed. The occupants of the third



boat had contracted smallpox, so they were camping separately each night, and they were floating far behind the other two boats. This made them an easy target for the Cherokees, who killed everyone on the third boat except one woman, whom they captured. Jones, who wrote in a time when most White Americans were hostile to American Indians, eagerly pointed out that many members of the tribe lost their lives when they contracted smallpox from the captured White woman.¹²

The surviving party finished their trip without further incident. They traveled about 600 miles down the winding Tennessee River, which was riddled with rocky shoals and swift currents, until they met the Ohio River near the city of Paducah, Kentucky. A short trip of 44 miles on the Ohio River brought them to the Mississippi River at Cairo, Illinois. They then traveled another 450 miles down the Mississippi, landing near the mouth of Coles Creek, and settled around three miles eastward on the creek at "Curtis Landing." There they established a village known as Uniontown, west of the present-day town of Fayette. Jack Curtis, a descendant of Richard Curtis, estimates that they arrived in the Natchez District around March, 1781.¹³ They had survived a trek through the mountains, an attack, and navigation of over 1,000 miles of rivers to reach their new home.

Settling in the Natchez District

The Spanish had taken control of the Natchez District in October 1779, shortly before the Curtis party arrived, but the Spanish had not established an efficient government or any control over land sales or occupation by adventurers. Settlers most likely occupied their selected homesites without any legal sanction.

The settlers' first objective was to earn a livelihood. In this new land they were dependent only on themselves. In the spring of 1781, they began to plant crops and construct houses. They built log houses from the abundant materials that were available. The lack of time and skilled artisans probably mean these first shelters were crude, but they served their purpose. Around the cabins a few acres of land were cleared, and crops were planted. The experience of one of these settlers has been described by a descendant of John Jones:

He found rich land ... a plentiful supply of game in the woods and fish and water-fowl in the creek, with plenty of spring and creek water convenient for man and beast. He soon put up a log cabin, cut and burned the cane and undergrowth ... and by doling out a scanty supply of seed-corn by the grain, soon had it planted. ... For a time, bread was not to be had, but Mr. Jones, with his trusty rifle ... kept his family supplied with game, principally venison and wild turkeys.¹⁴

These sojourners had settled, uninvited, in the territory of the Choctaw Nation. Local American Indians would occasionally attack the farms of the White settlers. Jones reports that once “the Indians had broken down a large portion of his corn, which was just getting into roasting ears, and had killed his only milk cow.”¹⁵

In 1783, the area that the Curtis party settled in was ceded to the United States by Great Britain through the Treaty of Paris. England knew she was creating a conflict between her former colonies and Spain, a state that had given them indirect support during the war. Spain was determined to hold the territories she had captured, because of their worth and because they afforded protection for her holdings south of the 31st parallel and the great Louisiana Territory west of the Mississippi River. The basic Spanish policy was to win the loyalty of those who resided in the territory and to increase the migration of Americans into the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys. The Spanish modified their traditional colonial policy by permitting the toleration of “heretics,” the admission of foreign immigrants, and the granting of a considerable degree of commercial freedom. These policies failed to win the ultimate allegiance of the settlers in the Natchez region.

When it became apparent that Spain would become embroiled in war with Great Britain, the Spanish government decided it would be to their best interest to reach an amicable agreement with the United States on the southern boundary and other questions of special interest to the west. In 1795, Pinckney’s Treaty of San Lorenzo fixed the southern boundary of the United States at the 31st parallel (where, today, the state line runs between Mississippi and Louisiana from the Mississippi River to the Pearl River). The actual transfer of the territory to United States sovereignty was not made until March 1798.

The first Baptist church in Mississippi

Meanwhile, on Coles Creek, the group of settlers met privately in their homes for Bible study and prayer but did not worship publicly, thus avoiding attention from the Roman Catholic authorities. The Curtis family lost their patriarch, Richard Curtis, Sr., on November 10, 1784, at age 56, but the embers of his faith fanned the next generation's flame. His son Richard Curtis, Jr., 29, had been licensed to preach when he lived in South Carolina. A license from a Baptist church then, as today, did not imply any formal theological education, but it did mean that a congregation formally endorsed him to preach the gospel. John Griffing Jones, writing a generation later, recalled family memories that Curtis was a well-regarded preacher, and that his brothers-in-law John and Jacob Stampley were also gifted at teaching the scriptures. Jones also recorded that Richard's older brother William and stepbrother John Jones were known for their prayers. By 1790, other settlers were inviting them to visit their homes and share their faith.¹⁶

In 1791, a group of seven people met at Margaret Stampley's home on Coles Creek in what is now Jefferson County to organize for religious worship. In attendance were Richard Curtis, Jr., pastor; William Thompson, recording clerk; William Curtis; John Jones; Benjamin Curtis; Ealiff Lanier; and Margaret Stampley. Lanier came from Georgia with her husband, Benjamin; the others were among the original settlers in the Curtis party from South Carolina. Notably missing were several men from the Curtis party, including Margaret Stampley's husband. The church was informally called Coles Creek Church, a name that continued until as late as 1806. By 1807, they had settled on the name Salem Baptist Church, according to when the church name appeared in the minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association.¹⁷

This small band of Baptists were subsistence farmers, not wealthy people, though they did buy and sell enslaved people. Court records and census information shed some light on their economic status. The Natchez court records say that Richard Curtis bought, with the surety of his brother-in-law John Stampley, a "Guinea Negro from Thomas Wilkins, atty, for Daniel Clark, for \$546.00 Mexican silver, on terms."¹⁸ The Spanish tobacco census showed that Richard Curtis, Jr., grew 1,000 pounds of tobacco in 1792. At the time, tobacco was the main export of the region to New Orleans. The census also reported that Margaret Stampley owned no land and that there

was one man, one woman, and one African female in her household. Her property consisted of one horse, 18 cows, nine swine, 70 bushels of corn, and two guns. The man in her household was of military age and may have been her son; she was listed as head of the household. John Jones reported owning 400 acres of land, with five men and four women in his household. He owned three horses, 20 cows, 20 swine, 100 bushels of corn, and two guns. One male child had been born recently, and there were three males of military age. William Thompson owned no land and had three men and three women in his household. His property consisted of two horses, eight cows, 20 swine, and 100 bushels of corn. One female had been born recently, and one man was of military age.¹⁹

These original Mississippi Baptists were only seven people among 4,600 inhabitants of the Natchez District in the 1792 census. Though small in number, this dedicated band was to begin a movement that would eventually make Mississippi the state with the highest concentration of Baptists in the nation.

Sometime early in the 1790s, this first Mississippi Baptist church gained their first two converts. Richard Curtis, Jr., was licensed to preach but had not been ordained to the gospel ministry. Thus, the church wrote to its home church in South Carolina to ask who would be authorized to administer baptism. The church in South Carolina returned an answer: "That there is no law against necessity, and under the present stress of circumstances the members ought to assemble and formally appoint one of their number, by election, to baptize the young converts." Richard Curtis, Jr., was chosen, and baptisms were conducted at night by torchlight so as not to be detected by the Spanish authorities. The first two converts were a wealthy citizen named William Hamberlin and a Spaniard named Stephen De Alvo (perhaps an abbreviation for De Alvaro; one source spells his name De Alvau), who had an Anglo wife. De Alvo renounced the Catholic faith, thus becoming the first Spanish Mississippi Baptist. This conversion would lead to conflict with the Catholic authorities. Richard Curtis, Jr., had signed an oath of allegiance to the Spanish governing authorities in 1787. Curtis did not consider his loyalty to the government in conflict with his loyalty to his religion, yet the secrecy of his actions showed his awareness that the Spanish did not recognize any religious rituals unless they were performed by a Roman Catholic priest.²⁰

Spanish persecution of the Baptists

The official policy of the Spanish government was to permit the private exercise of Protestant religion but to prohibit any public worship. Don Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, governor of the Natchez District, thought the policy helpful and hoped that the Protestants were being won over gradually to Roman Catholicism. Gayoso de Lemos was under the authority of the governor-general in New Orleans, who under a royal edict in 1792 declared the religious laws for “English Anglo-American and other Foreign Protestant colonists” living in the Spanish provinces of Louisiana and East and West Florida. This edict said that “small children of Protestants should be baptized according to the Catholic Ritual, as the tolerance of Sects with private worship has been limited to the Adult residents since the time of British Dominion and of Emigration, but not to their posterity.” Governor Gayoso de Lemos declared the Protestant’s conversion “would have progressed more rapidly but for the character of the Irish priests at Natchez, one of whom did not preach a public sermon in the whole period of his ministry, while the other preached only too often on the grievous sin of tolerating heretics.”²¹

In 1795, Ebenezer Drayton, a Presbyterian in Natchez, described the local Baptists as “weak men, of weak minds.” But these so-called “weak men” would soon come into direct conflict with the Catholic stronghold in Natchez.²²

That same year, the Spanish authorities issued an edict to maintain the Catholic religion and to enforce their policy of prohibiting any other public worship. It declared “that if nine persons were found worshipping together, except according to the forms of the Catholic Church, they should suffer imprisonment.” Also in 1795, Pinckney’s Treaty was negotiated, providing for the transfer of the Natchez territory to the sovereignty of the United States. The necessity for the edict was the arrival in the territory of thousands of American citizens who were Protestant or at least more sympathetic to the Protestant faith—those unlikely to accept Catholicism. Their faith was an important factor in the hostility of the settlers to Spanish rule and one of the reasons the Spanish government was willing to cede the territory to the United States.²³ The Catholic priests in Natchez protested the presence of the Baptist congregation on Coles Creek. Governor Gayoso

de Lemos, who had been lenient in this matter, was forced to take some action. An order was issued forbidding the pioneer band to continue “their heretical psalm-singing, praying, and preaching in public or they would be subject to sundry pains and penalties.” Curtis continued his activity in spite of this order, and he received a letter from Gayoso de Lemos urging him to cease and desist non-Catholic worship. Curtis protested, affirming that “in the name of and strength of God, he was determined to persevere in what he had deliberately conceived to be his duty.” In reaction to this opposition, Curtis was arrested on April 6, 1795, and brought before the governor in Natchez. There he was charged with “preaching in this District; contrary to our Holy Religion and orders of the Government, who was warned that any direct or indirect incident in the said offense, would confiscate his goods, and be expelled from these Provinces.” In the face of this dire threat, Curtis made the required promise and was released.²⁴

Salem decided that Curtis’s promise did not prevent them from holding “meetings for Christian conference, prayer, and exhortation.” Still, they took precautions to have guards and sentinels posted when they assembled. If the alarm was sounded, they dispersed immediately. The church prospered as new settlers came to the area, some of whom were Baptists. In 1795, William Chaney, a Baptist deacon from South Carolina, joined Salem, along with his son Bailey Chaney, who was a preacher; Barton Hannan; William Owen; and a man by the name of Harigail. None of these men were ordained, but all actively preached the gospel.²⁵ This increase in religious activity raised the ire of the Catholic establishment in Natchez until finally an incident occurred which brought the wrath of the Spanish authorities on Curtis and his friends. Phoebe Jones, Curtis’s niece, was engaged to a man named David Greenleaf. She did not want the ceremony to be performed by a Catholic priest or a civil officer, as the Spanish law required, so she asked her uncle to perform the wedding. This created a crisis of conscience for Curtis. In 1792 the Spanish authorities had issued an edict restricting Protestant sects; it had a very clear statement about weddings, declaring “null and void those marriages, that are celebrated in the future by Colonists resident in Spanish territory before Foreign Protestant Ministers, or Magistrate, or in any other form, and are subject to the penalties of confiscation of goods and expulsion from Spanish Domains forever.” If Curtis agreed to perform the wedding, he would be putting

himself at great risk. Nevertheless, Curtis consented, under the condition that the wedding be held in strict privacy. Greenleaf acquired a marriage license and met the bridal party, including Curtis, riding on the road in the opposite direction. They gave a sign and countersign to indicate that it was safe to meet, and the wedding was conducted by torchlight under an oak tree near the home of William Stampley on May 24, 1795.²⁶

Curtis and the wedding party had good reason to be secretive. Governor Gayoso de Lemos had sent a spy, Ebenezer Drayton, to infiltrate the group and report on their activities. He reported that at first the Baptists were “afraid of me, and they immediately guessed that I was employed by Government, which I denied.” However, he convinced them that his “feelings were much like theirs ... my being of the Protestant Sect called Presbyterians and they of the Baptist.” Thus reassured, they allowed Drayton to attend their meetings, but Drayton wrote letters informing the Spanish “Catholic Majesty,” as he called Gayoso de Lemos, of their activities.²⁷

Whether or not the Spanish heard of the secret Baptist wedding, they knew all about the continued religious activity among what they called “the Anti-Baptist sect” thanks to spies like Drayton. “Anti-Baptist” was a pejorative term seeking to link them with the Anabaptist movement that began in the 16th century on the European continent, a Protestant group that opposed infant baptism but had some other theological and practical differences from the English Baptist movement. One Anabaptist group had violently taken over the town of Münster, Germany, in 1534, and those Anabaptists had instituted a communist economy and polygamous marriage. The infamous events at Münster made Anabaptists odious to most Europeans.²⁸

On July 9, 1795, Carlos Louis Boucher de Grand Pré in Natchez wrote a letter to the governor of Louisiana, Francisco Luis Hector Carondelet, in New Orleans, expressing his anxiety over the growth of the Baptist settlement. The letter said that Richard Curtis sought a passport to leave the Natchez District and return to the United States to look for some goods he had there. He had hardly left the settlement, the letter continued, when “four inhabitants deputized by all of the Anti-Baptist sect, that is the most numerous, requested, in the name of all, that he return to his house to continue preaching to them.” The letter went on to say that Curtis believed it was a divine inspiration and agreed to return home, “where on Sundays, there is verified a large concentration of sectarians to hear his moral.” Grand

Pré complained that “some inhabitants carry, to the point of rapture, their affection for this preacher, wishing to maintain him among them.” He also worried that even if Curtis left, there were three other preachers, and, “lacking these, others would appear.”²⁹

Ebenezer Drayton must have been listening to the sermons of Richard Curtis during this time, because he summarized Curtis’s sermons in a letter to Governor Gayoso de Lemos:

If they let us alone, enjoy our religion and serve God, we shall be as good subjects as any they have, but if not, this is a ruined Country. If they take me I do not know the consequences. I must not give to man the things that belong to God, for I must be obedient to God, rather than men.

God commends us to believe in Jesus Christ and be baptized, and we shall be saved, and that if we believe not we shall be damned; but man says we shall not baptize in the way which we believe to be the way of God’s appointing. God has called me I trust to teach and baptize, and God says, fear not him that can kill the body only, but fear him that can cast the soul into everlasting fire. Christ says, he that is ashamed of me before men, him will I be ashamed of before my Father and his Holy Angels—But I am not ashamed nor afraid to serve Jesus Christ I am not ashamed of his service, and if I suffer for serving him, I am willing to suffer, and those who fight against them that serve God, will be found fighting against God. I am willing to give to Caesar (meaning to Kings) the things that be Caesars, but I must give unto God the things that be God’s. If I cannot serve God here, I must go where I can serve him. I would not have signed that paper if I had then known that it was the will of God I should stay here anytime, as I have done; but as neither my heart nor body was greed but signed it out of fear, then parting to leave the Country immediately. So I do not feel it as binding by conscience, tho’ I expect to be obliged to leave the Country, for I must obey the call and commands of God, and must warn the wicked to depart from his evil ways and deeds, and to come unto Christ.³⁰

The Spanish decided to arrest Curtis again. Louisiana Governor Carondelet replied to Grand Pré’s letter, instructing him to capture Curtis when

he boarded a galley on the Mississippi River, but to do so at night, “taking for his capture the possible precautions, with the end of avoiding a commotion among this Sectarians.” Carondelet complained that the Baptists had an “erred concept” that the government promised religious freedom and insisted that they had “repeatedly made known and affirmed that the public worship of all sects that are not the Roman Catholic apostolic religion are prohibited, but under no circumstances will we violate their opinions, or methods of thought in Religious materials.” Carondelet concluded that this policy of allowing private religious opinions but only Catholic publish worship was “sweet prudence,” the result being that most inhabitants would be satisfied. “The unbending will migrate, and the Radicals and old anti-Baptists will shut up.”³¹

Richard Curtis defends his religious liberty

Carondelet’s policy did not force the Baptists to “shut up.” Instead, Curtis published a public letter a few days later, on July 16, 1795, written in both English and Spanish, challenging the right of the Spanish to persecute his faith. Titled a “Declaration of Richard Curtis, Natchez,” the letter declared “the reasons for which I do not leave this country.” This letter was discovered in Spanish colonial records by Curtis’s descendant Jack Curtis, who made it public in 1997. Not only is this the only document we have written by Richard Curtis, Jr., but it gives us insight into his defense of religious liberty as he lays down the gauntlet against Spanish authorities. Below is the full text of the letter:

To any who may inquire to know my reasons for not going away out of the country, the first reason was, that the season of the year was very disagreeable, and the time very short, so I was disappointed, of my intention at present.

Another reason was that the people could not bear that I should go and leave them for these reasons, assigned first that, my conduct and manner of life, has been known and proved by many people, here and elsewhere, now of a long time, to be unspotted from dishonesty together with my best wishes, for the welfare of king and country,

and not only these but the benefits of the gospel and worshiping God amongst them as my custom and manner “Ever has been to set forth before their eyes Jesus Christ the only Lord, and Saviour of sinners, and the necessity of being Converted to that savior.” I also persuaded men everywhere to fear God and honor the king according to the Scripture command, which things had no attendances, to disaffect the people’s minds, these things have I not done without license from America, for this several years past, from which publick benefit to the useless privacy, was I ordered to sign an obligation, contrary to the law of nature let alone the Law of God, that consequences of which was known to me at the time when it was done; now, in ecclesiastical matters, as the Scripture has said, “Whether shall I obey God or man, judge ye.”

And now I am brought to consider, how that if I was a whoremonger, a drunkard, a swearer, or a liar, which things I hate; then mine enemies who are so ready to inform against me would have little to say.

I am happy to think that I am persecuted and hated for well doing, and not evil, as was our fore fathers.

Now what ever information may be against me, I have only taken the liberty which every man takes, and that is to be governor of my own house and what greater opposition can be upon a man than to deprive him of the full authority of my own house, if it should be the case.

I beg and pray the kind and wise consideration of all whom this may concern and the good it may do is unknown.

From under my hand as a friend, [Signed] Richard Curtis

My little addition and humble opinion upon the late matters of concern; I only make mention of these two. First, the promise of liberty to us from the ancient and gracious king of Spain, which proclamation we heard with our ears, which promise of liberty is taken away and under a sense of this, our hearts has fell to the ground, secondly, the malignant information against us, laid in before the authority by some who call themselves Christians, tho are unworthy of the Name, because they carry in their bosom the Coals of Juniper, and others dropping letters “out of spite to us” as we have heard. The above written information indulged I fear will be the ruin of us all.

Now we are called heretics, tho very improperly, for we acknowledge

the Triune God, and Christ, the only Lord and Savior of sinners, by faith, but heretics deny Christ.³²

In this letter, Curtis sought to defend himself before both the Spanish authorities and in the court of public opinion. To the Roman Catholic Spanish, he pointed out that he had always honored the king, and that the inhabitants of the Natchez District understood that the king of Spain promised them religious liberty. He added that he was falsely accused of heresy, pointing out his affirmation of the Trinity and “Jesus Christ the only Lord, and Saviour.” This was an important distinction, since the Spanish inquisitions were more tolerant of Protestants than others who were considered heretics. He even noted that he had a religious “license from America,” probably a reference to being licensed to preach by a Baptist church in South Carolina.

This letter had a greater audience, for most of his neighbors in the region were not Spanish; they were settlers from the former English colonies that had recently become the United States of America. To this audience, he stressed that his promise not to preach was made under duress, saying he was “ordered to sign.” He reminded his readers that when Peter and the apostles were arrested for preaching, they said, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Curtis also referred to his upstanding citizenship, mentioning that he was not a “drunkard.” In perhaps his most persuasive statement, he said, “I have only taken the liberty which every man takes, and that is to be governor of my own house,” reminding the general public that, whatever their religious beliefs, if a man could be arrested for what he said and did peacefully in his own home, then many other liberties were threatened, as well.

Curtis indicated that he was deeply hurt by “the malignant information against us, laid in before the authority by some who call themselves Christians.” His remark that “they carry in their bosom the Coals of Juniper” alluded to Psalm 120:4, a psalm praying for God’s protection from false accusers. This conclusion may have in mind the words of Drayton, who had written that Baptists “are weak men of weak minds, and illiterate, and too ignorant to know how inconsistent they act and talk, and that they are only carried away with a frenzy or blind zeal about what they know not what ...”³³

Curtis flees into exile

Religious tensions in the Natchez District had reached a boiling point. Richard Curtis's public letter alone was enough to cause the Spanish to want to arrest him again, and even more so when word got out that David Greenleaf and Phoebe Curtis's wedding had been performed by the Baptist pastor. The climactic event came when an armed Spanish posse of four or five men attempted to raid a Sunday worship gathering of Baptists at Curtis's home on August 23, 1795. Their plan was to arrest Curtis as well as his converts, Hamberlin and De Alvo. All three men escaped northward and hid in a canebrake near Bayou Pierre, a river in Claiborne County that runs west into the Mississippi River.

As the authorities searched for them, the three men realized their only hope was to leave behind their wives, children, and farms and escape back east to wait until American control could be exerted over the Natchez District and religious liberty could finally be guaranteed. At first no one, not even their fellow Baptists, had the courage to take them supplies to make their escape for fear of being arrested. Then two people stepped forward to help: a man, William Ratliff, from the heights near Natchez, who supplied Curtis with a horse (Ratliff would later join the Baptist church), and a daring woman, Chloe Holt, who lived near Bayou Pierre. Since no man was willing to take the supplies of food, money, and clothing, Holt said, "If the *men* in the neighborhood are so faint-hearted that not one of them can be prevailed upon to take Dick Curtis and his companions in exile their promised supplies, in order to secure their escape from the clutches of these gospel-hating Catholics, if they will furnish me with a good horse, surmounted with a *man's saddle*, I will go in spite of the Spaniards, and they may catch me if they can." Holt proudly told of her adventure for the rest of her life.³⁴

Grand Pré knew that the Baptist fugitives could not hide in the canebrake forever. Anticipating that they would attempt to sneak aboard a galley departing Natchez, he wrote to Carondelet that he prepared to arrest Curtis "with the greatest secrecy" if he caught him in the port of Natchez, so as not to stir up the inhabitants who sympathized with Curtis. However, Curtis had already departed from the Natchez District with people who came down the Ohio River in flatboats, joining them on a trip up the Nat-

chez Trace toward Nashville, from which Curtis continued to his former home of South Carolina. Learning that Curtis had made his escape, Grand Pré wrote again to Carondelet, "I am certain that Curtis will not return to this country, but in case he does you can count that he will be apprehended." Another letter from Grand Pré to Carondelet on August 30, 1795, confirmed that Curtis had left and complained of the "enthusiasm" and opposition of the inhabitants against the Spanish government's treatment of Curtis.³⁵

While Curtis was in exile in South Carolina, he was ordained by South Carolina pastors Benjamin Mosely and Matthew McCullers, both of whom were from Ebenezer Baptist Church on Jeffries Creek, near Florence, South Carolina. Ezra Courtney and Hardy Brian were also active at Ebenezer Baptist; both would later come to Mississippi and assist Curtis in starting Ebenezer Baptist Church (Amite), in 1806. David Cooper, another pastor from Ebenezer Baptist Church, Florence, later came to Mississippi to pastor Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson).³⁶

Continued persecution and turbulence in the Natchez District

With Curtis in exile, the lone deacon at Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson) was William Chaney. Chaney took charge of the church, baptizing new converts and continuing to preach as the Spanish exerted greater pressure on the Baptists. But this persecution only succeeded in raising sympathy for the Baptists from other American settlers in the Natchez District, including those who were not religious but who saw their liberties threatened. An attempt was made to arrest a Baptist named Harigail, but Morris Custard, a gambler, hid him in the woods by Custard's house. The Spanish authorities finally captured Harigail and imprisoned him in a dungeon for months. Some of the Baptists submitted to Spanish rules about religion while refusing to become Catholic. For example, on July 29, 1796, John Lanier, the son of Salem founding member Ealiff Lanier, was married in Natchez by a Catholic priest. Their marriage certificate read: "John Lanier, a Calvinist of Georgia ... and Elizabeth Ryan, a Calvinist of Kentucky" were married "according to the rite of the Roman Catholic Church."³⁷

Meanwhile, the American government began the process of taking con-

trol of the Natchez District. The Spanish controlled the government and exercised the legal authority, but that authority was weakened by a large influx of American settlers and by the knowledge that the Spanish authority was of a temporary nature. Land speculation was running wild, as the state of Georgia claimed all of the territory in present-day Alabama and Mississippi, and land speculators began arriving in Natchez from Georgia.³⁸

Around this time, a Baptist preacher named Turney Mulkey appeared in Natchez. The Catholics sent an officer to his meeting to take him, but Mulkey's congregation resisted and forced the officer to leave. The congregation was so angered by this attempted arrest that they armed themselves and fired on the Spanish fort. The governor sent a message promising to allow Mulkey to preach if they would cease fire, and they did. Meanwhile, the governor sent for reinforcements and ammunition from Baton Rouge, so Mulkey and his supporters fled.³⁹

In February 1797, Louisiana Governor Carondelet sent orders to Gayoso de Lemos to dismantle the fort at Natchez in compliance with the treaty, but soon after, Gayoso de Lemos received orders from Spain to postpone the dismantling as Spain hoped to talk to the Americans about alterations to the treaty. The same month, Andrew Ellicott arrived with a commission from the American president to mark the southern boundary of the United States at the 31st parallel, which was about 30 miles south of Natchez, in accordance with the treaty to give to America all lands east of the Mississippi River. Ellicott had a small army escort under Lieutenant Percy Smith Pope and two dozen woodsmen from Fort Pitt in Pennsylvania. Ellicott, Pope, and their party docked at Natchez on February 24, 1797. They camped on a knoll overlooking the town. At Patrick Connelly's tavern atop the hill, the Americans boldly raised the United States flag so that it could be seen by the Spanish from the fort. Gayoso de Lemos and his garrison of 60 Spanish soldiers refused to leave. Ellicott and Gayoso de Lemos wrote letters back and forth as the standoff continued for months, neither party willing to give in. Lt. Pope preferred a direct attack, recruiting 200 men from Coles Creek to mount an attack on the Spanish fort, but Gayoso de Lemos arrested the leaders and broke up the plot. Ellicott, who was a Quaker, preferred negotiation and political maneuver to get the Spanish to leave. He counted on the loyalty of most of the American settlers, since it was only a few wealthy landowners who were solidly loyal to the Spanish. He received the

leverage he needed from a Baptist preacher.⁴⁰

Barton Hannan, a preacher previously active at Salem, arrived in Natchez preaching fiery words, damning the pope, and recruiting volunteers for a revolt. Hannan got into a drunken brawl with some Irish Catholics on June 9, 1797, and they mauled him. Gayoso de Lemos arrested Hannan for disturbing the peace, which only led to more disturbances. His wife marched to Natchez, their baby in her arms, and demanded that Gayoso de Lemos release Hannan. Gayoso de Lemos tried to calm her by caressing the baby and giving her presents. "I don't want your presents; I want my husband," she said. He replied, "I cannot grant your request, madam." She answered, "I will have him before tomorrow morning, or this place shall be deluged in blood; for there are men enough who have pledged themselves to release him before morning, or die in the attempt, to overcome any force you have here." She was not making an idle threat, for on June 12, over 300 armed men assembled at William Belk's tavern on the Natchez Trace to organize a rebellion. The governor released Hannan, and from that point forward, the Spanish lost real control of Natchez. In December 1797, Captain Isaac Guion arrived in Natchez with a large unit of American troops and put still greater pressure on Gayoso de Lemos to leave. The Spanish finally departed on March 30, 1798.⁴¹

Religious freedom gained in the Mississippi Territory

Immediately after the Spanish withdrew from Natchez, American officials raised the flag of the United States and invited Bailey E. Chaney, son of Salem's deacon William Chaney, to preach before a large gathering, the very first sermon under the American flag in the new Mississippi Territory. At long last, religious freedom was allowed in Natchez, and a Baptist was called on to celebrate it with God's word.⁴²

It was time for Richard Curtis, Jr., to return to his family and his church in Mississippi. The three exiled men arrived in the Stampley settlement near Coles Creek early on a Sunday morning in summer 1798, and Curtis was told by those he met on the road that he would find his wife, Patsy, and his family at the house of worship. He found a meeting house had been built of logs and furnished with a pulpit and seats, but his family was not

there. The congregation welcomed him, assuring him that his wife and five children were doing well and would surely arrive soon. They urged him to preach. He agreed and took his seat behind the pulpit, head down, looking at his hymnal and Bible, when his wife arrived and quietly took her usual seat by the wall. Nobody said a word about her husband's return. When Curtis stood to preach and Mrs. Curtis saw her long-lost husband, she shrieked and fainted on the spot. The delay was followed by an emotional sermon, a day those present would never forget. The days of conflict and fear of religious repression were over.⁴³

Chapter 2

The First Baptist Association of Mississippi

1798 – 1820

The transfer of the Natchez region to the sovereignty of the United States in 1798 opened many new opportunities for the Baptists. The first article of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, under which the Mississippi Territory was to be governed, provided that “no person, demeaning himself in a peaceable and orderly manner, shall ever be molested on account of his mode of worship, or religious sentiments, in the said territory.”¹ A similar provision was included in 1791 in the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. Baptists enjoyed new religious freedom in the new Republic.

Baptists actively participated in the newly developing political framework of the Mississippi Territory. The appointments of territorial governors reflected the political tensions between the Federalist Party of President John Adams and the Republican Party of Thomas Jefferson (the forerunner of the modern Democratic Party). Wealthy planters in Mississippi favored the Federalists, but most common farmers, including most Baptists, favored the Republicans. The election of Thomas Jefferson as U.S. president in 1800 provided Mississippians with a series of Republican territorial governors. In 1803, Napoleon sold the vast lands of the Louisiana Territory to the United States, opening the Port of New Orleans to American control and Mississippi trade. In 1807, former U.S. Vice President Aaron Burr, a

Federalist, was arrested in the Natchez District under suspicion of trying to make the Mississippi and Louisiana territories into a new nation, but a pro-Federalist grand jury in Washington, Mississippi, would not indict him. Mississippi's last territorial governor was David Holmes, a Republican and friend of James Madison, the author of the First Amendment and defender of religious liberty. Holmes allowed the territory to have a legislative assembly, and later he would be elected as Mississippi's first governor.²

The political boundaries of the Natchez District were enlarged when the territory came under the control of the United States, and it was given the name Mississippi Territory. In 1804, the territory was extended northward to the Tennessee line, and, in 1813, southward to the Gulf Coast to encompass the present-day states of Mississippi and Alabama. The expansiveness of the political boundaries was misleading, however; American Indian tribes occupied most of the lands, so most of the White population was concentrated in southwest Mississippi around Natchez.³

Another factor in transforming Mississippi in the early 1800s was the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney in 1793. No longer was cotton production limited to the long staple variety that only grew in swampy lowlands. Thanks to the cotton gin, it was profitable to grow short staple cotton, which grew in the uplands throughout most of the South. Many Mississippi farmers switched from products like tobacco to cotton, and many more settlers came to Mississippi in hopes of growing the "white gold" that could be shipped from the Port of Natchez to world markets.

This craving for cotton led to conflict between the White men who wanted to open American Indian lands for settlement and the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creek tribes who wanted to protect their land. Encroachment and war by the White men gradually forced the tribes to give up their lands. In 1805, the Choctaw tribe ceded areas of south-central Mississippi at the Treaty of Mount Dexter. Then, during the War of 1812, General Andrew Jackson came to the Mississippi Territory. Before fighting the British, he fought the American Indians. The Choctaw tribe decided to ally themselves with the Americans and General Jackson, and the Creeks were defeated at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814, ending most American Indian resistance to White settlement. In 1816, the Chickasaw tribe ceded a small area around the present-day city of Columbus. In 1820, the second Choctaw cession in the Treaty of Doak's Stand added a large area

of east-central and northwest Mississippi. (Most of northeast Mississippi would remain in Chickasaw hands until 1832.) The opening of these lands led to the rapid spread of American settlements east and north of Natchez. The population grew to 7,600 in 1800; 31,306 in 1810; and 75,448 in 1820.⁴ Just as the Baptists in the Natchez District were gaining religious freedom and beginning to see population growth, the Second Great Awakening was moving across America among all Protestant denominations. It began with revivals in towns across New England in 1797, and the revival caught fire in August 1801 at the historic camp meeting at Cane Ridge in Bourbon County, Kentucky, spreading throughout Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, and the “Old Southwest” of Mississippi and Alabama. Kentucky Baptist membership doubled between 1800 and 1803, and many of them moved to the Mississippi Territory. Church historian Sydney E. Ahlstrom says the effect of the Second Great Awakening in Kentucky on the “Old Southwest” was the “significant number of strongly committed laymen who become missionaries without formal commissioning” as they migrated to the southern backcountry.⁵

New Baptist churches organized

During the decade prior to the Second Great Awakening, there had only been one Baptist congregation in the Natchez District: Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson), a few miles southeast of the present-day town of Fayette. But the triple blessings of religious liberty, population growth, and spiritual renewal aided in the formation of five new churches from 1798 to 1806. Bayou Pierre Baptist Church (Claiborne), the second Mississippi Baptist church, was established near Port Gibson on Bayou Pierre, the same river where Richard Curtis, Jr., and his friends hid from Spanish arrest. How appropriate that in 1798, the year of his return, Curtis, along with William Thompson, John Stampley, Benjamin Curtis, Jacob Stampley, Joseph Perkins, and William Thomas assisted in the constitution of the new church in the home of Thomas Hubbard. It is interesting to note that most of the members of this committee were among the arrivals in the 1780s. It is unclear whether Curtis left Salem to pastor Bayou Pierre or he preached at both churches.



Ebenezer Baptist Church, Amite County. Founded in 1806, it is the oldest Baptist congregation in Mississippi to exist without interruption. It is located at 2856 Ebenezer Church Rd., Liberty, Mississippi. *Photograph by Robert C. Rogers.*

Thus, at the dawn of the 19th century, there were only two Baptist churches in the state: Salem, established in 1791, and Bayou Pierre, established in 1798. Over the next six years, as the Second Great Awakening spread across America, four more Baptist churches were founded in Mississippi. In 1800, two Baptist churches were organized: New Hope Baptist Church (Adams), located on Second Creek just south of Natchez, and Bethel Baptist Church (Wilkinson), on the river Bayou Sara, four miles southwest of the town of Woodville. In 1805, New Providence Baptist Church (Amite) was organized. In 1806, Richard Curtis organized Ebenezer Baptist Church (Amite) near the Louisiana line. Curtis was likely involved in starting many, if not all, of these new churches; the records show that Curtis's old South Carolina friend, Dr. David Cooper, was pastor of Salem by 1808, and after Curtis started Ebenezer in 1806, he turned over the pastorate to another South Carolina friend, Ezra Courtney, in November 1808. Curtis became pastor of New Hope and remained there until his death in 1811.⁶ Of these original six churches, only Ebenezer has existed without interruption to this day.

However, there is a complicated claim to which church is the oldest. While Ebenezer has the distinction of being the oldest continually meeting Baptist church in Mississippi, Woodville Baptist Church, Woodville (Wilkinson), boasts the oldest house of worship in the state. Although the exact date that it opened is unknown, a “Baptist Meeting House” was built in Woodville and the building was chartered by the state legislature on January 7, 1824, to “benefit of the Baptist denomination of Christians, and such Baptist Church, as at any time may be constituted in the town of Woodville.” Bethel, just south of Woodville, ceased to meet sometime in the 1830s, but in 1853, Baptists reorganized the church in Woodville and took the name Bethel, saying “there had once been a Baptist Church in this place and in the neighborhood ... and the one in the town had long ceased to exist, though the old house of worship still stood it was so debilitated as not to be used for any purpose.” The congregation meeting in the refurbished building later changed its name to Woodville Baptist Church, the name it uses to this day. Despite the temporary use of the Bethel name, the Woodville church is not the same congregation as the one founded in 1800.⁷

Mississippi Baptist Association organized

The Baptists of the Mississippi Territory organized a new religious association in 1807, a decade before the politicians organized a new state in 1817. They had been accustomed to cooperating with sister churches, as the first Baptist settlers came from churches that were members of the Charleston Baptist Association in South Carolina. The “association” was a typical form of cooperation among Baptist churches throughout America; Baptists, who believed strongly in local autonomy, had not yet seen a need for a national organization. Since the number of churches in the Mississippi Territory had increased, it was fitting that Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson), the mother church, should suggest to the other churches a cooperative relationship. Representatives from five of the six Baptist churches sent delegates to Salem on August 1, 1806, and the group met again on February 27, 1807, to organize the first Baptist association in Mississippi. The representatives to the meetings at Salem agreed to a permanent organization

with a statement of faith and detailed rules of decorum for their meetings, as well as a specific statement of what the association could and could not do (see full document in Appendix C). They agreed to hold the first official meeting from September 26 to 29, 1807, at Bethel Baptist Church (Wilkinson).⁸

The minutes of the first meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Association reveal an acquaintance with the practices of associations in other parts of the United States and set a precedent for future meetings. There were five churches represented at the 1807 meeting; each sent two representatives. There were several other attendees; the minutes recorded “ministering brethren present, not delegated” and mentioned electing a clerk who was not a delegate. The first meeting took place from Saturday through Tuesday with Saturday and Sunday “spent in public worship, concluding with the administration of the Lord’s supper” and business sessions held on Monday and Tuesday.⁹

Purpose of the Mississippi Baptist Association

As a minority religion on the frontier, this association strengthened Baptist fellowship and encouraged one another in the faith, and it offered churches accountability and guidance. While the association’s own rules said it was not allowed to “infringe upon any of the internal rights of the churches,” the founding principles also stated, “It shall be the duty of this association to give the churches the best advice in its power in difficult matters; to inquire not any difficulties which may exist between sister churches, and to remove them, if possible.”¹⁰ Thus, the association sought to balance local church autonomy with accountability.

For the first few years, the association sponsored additional “union meetings” during the year at various churches for fellowship and inspiration. Each church would write a letter of greeting to the association, which often included a report on that church’s progress, which would be read at the annual meeting. Similarly, the Mississippi Baptist Association would send and receive letters of greeting to other associations. For example, in 1811, members were appointed to write letters from the Mississippi association to the Hepzibah Baptist Association, Georgia; Georgia Baptist

Association, Georgia; Cumberland Baptist Association, Tennessee; and Savannah Baptist Association, Georgia. Although the Mississippi Baptist Association was forbidden by its own rules to interfere with internal church affairs, it regularly received queries in church letters requesting advice regarding difficult matters, which were debated and voted upon. An annual “circular letter” was written each year by one of the pastors and distributed to churches. These circulars covered topics such as church discipline, the union of churches, education, doctrinal issues such as final perseverance of the believer, and duties of enslavers and enslaved people. The association also organized efforts to supply preachers to churches in need of ministers to fill their pulpits—and steer them away from others. In 1809, the Mississippi Association received a letter from Georgia warning them of “the base and wicked conduct of a certain James Garnet, who passes himself in this Territory as a Baptist preacher,” and in 1810 the association warned churches that John Wood “was expelled from the Baptist connection.”¹¹ The topic of how to correctly handle church discipline was a major concern, as evidenced in the minutes of many Baptist churches during that time. Many of the queries to the association were regarding this subject; in 1813, someone wrote, “What course shall a church take when an excommunicated person from a distant church applies for fellowship?” The answer was, “In all such cases churches must act discretionally.” Twice, in 1809 and in 1814, the circular was on the subject of church discipline. In 1809, Dr. David Cooper, who at that time was pastor of Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson), wrote that private sins should be handled privately and even in the case of public sins a church should first attempt restoration privately, following the guidelines of Matthew 18:15–17. He also warned that it should not be brought to the whole church without at least two witnesses, as in 2 Corinthians 13:1. He concluded, “In order that you may conduct yourselves with propriety, dignity and honor, there are two things absolutely necessary. First, a knowledge of the holy scriptures; and secondly, that you should be influenced by the spirit of Christ.” In 1814, David Snodgrass from Clear Creek Baptist Church, Washington (Adams), cited Matthew 18:15–17 and other scriptures, calling for a balanced approach between “false tenderness” and discipline as “weapons of private revenge.” He said, “It is love that is the grand secret of church discipline; and those members whose hearts are glowing with love

to God, and love to man, are most successful in producing and preserving harmony and purity among the followers of Christ.”¹²

Doctrinal viewpoint of the association

While some Baptists in America were General Baptists, holding to Arminian theology, most were Particular Baptists, following Calvinist theology. The first Baptist association in America was the Philadelphia Baptist Association, founded in 1711; it was Particular Baptist. The Philadelphia association had great doctrinal influence on other Baptists across the nation, including the Charleston Baptist Association, the first Baptist association in the South.

A third group of Baptists was spreading rapidly across the South, starting in Sandy Creek, North Carolina. Separate Baptists had parted ways with the Congregationalist churches after the Great Awakening in the 1700s, becoming Baptists by adopting the believer's baptism by immersion. They held to Calvinist theology just like the Baptists of the Charleston Baptist Association, but they were more evangelistic and less interested in education or theological nuances. Since both groups held Particular Baptist theology, the older group began to refer to themselves as Regular Baptists, to distinguish themselves from Separate Baptists. “Separate Baptists represented Calvinism with a difference,” writes Baptist historian Leon McBeth.¹³ Like the Regular Baptists, they believed in predestination, but they also believed that sinners may freely choose to repent and follow Christ, and thus they had an urgency to share the gospel.

The Mississippi Baptist Association was a Regular Baptist group. Its leadership came from the Charleston Baptist Association, South Carolina, and it showed in their emphasis on precise doctrine and the importance of education. The circular letter of 1811 by Ezra Courtney, pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church (Amite), said, “In the work of salvation there is an eminent and glorious display of divine power. Those who are elected according to the foreknowledge of God, and regenerated by the operation of the divine spirit, are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation; so that they shall never perish, but be everlastingly saved.” In 1818, the Mississippi Association organized the Mississippi Baptist Education Society to “assist

pious, evangelical young men, called to the work of the gospel ministry, in receiving a literary and theological education.”¹⁴

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, many Regular Baptist and Separate Baptist associations merged, finding they had more in common than not. A study of the 1816 doctrinal statement of Sandy Creek Baptist Association, North Carolina, which was Separate Baptist, shows a common source with the 1807 Articles of Faith of the Mississippi Baptist Association. Both begin with the same words—“We believe in one only true and living God”—and both statements describe God as “Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the same in essence, equal in power and glory.” The section on end times is almost identical in the two statements: “We believe in the resurrection of the dead, and a general judgment, and that the happiness of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked will be eternal.” In 1814, the Mississippi association appointed a committee to consider revising its fourth article, which expressed a firm Calvinist belief in “the eternal, unconditional election of a definite number of the human family to grace and glory.” The committee, chaired by Ezra Courtney, recommended keeping the language as it was, and adding scripture references to back it up (Jeremiah 31:3, Ephesians 1:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:4, 1 Peter 1:2, 2 Timothy 2:19, John 10:3, John 7:37, and John 17:1). Whatever evangelistic influence Separate Baptists may have had on the Mississippi group in the early 1800s did not cause them to deviate from Calvinist doctrine.¹⁵

Growth and new organizations

Membership in the Mississippi Baptist Association grew steadily, both in the number of churches and total membership. At the first meeting in 1807, the churches reported a total of 196 members.¹⁶ In the following decade, this number increased exponentially.

Dramatic events in the next few years in Mississippi resulted in revival among the Baptists. On December 16, 1811, an earthquake in New Madrid, Missouri, was felt in Natchez, where clocks stopped, houses were damaged, and the river rose and fell rapidly. Beginning in June of the following year, the War of 1812 further rocked the area. The circular letter of the Mississippi Baptist Association in 1813 was on the subject of “The

War.” It declared the war with Britain to be “a war of just and necessary defence.” It called for unity to defend “the rich inheritance of freedom we possess.” During this tumultuous time, the territory experienced a religious revival. In 1813, 246 people were baptized into membership in the churches of the Mississippi Baptist Association, far more than any year in the decade before or after, and the total membership nearly doubled that year, from 494 to 914.¹⁷

Baptist fervor for evangelism and missions resulted in the organization of a national denomination of Baptists in 1814. For more than a hundred years, since the Philadelphia Baptist Association, Pennsylvania, organized in 1707, the only formal organizational structure of Baptists in America had been that of an association, usually limited to a local geographical area smaller than a state. However, the rise of the modern missions movement caused Baptists to rethink their polity, as international missions needed a national effort to support them. Thus, in May 1814, a group of 33 delegates met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and organized the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions, known later as the Triennial Convention, because its meetings were held every three years. Its managing board, the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions for the United States, immediately began a correspondence with the 115 U.S. Baptist associations. The Mississippi association was so enthusiastic about this work that they voted to send all of the money raised at their meeting to the foreign missions cause—after the expense of printing the minutes. In 1817, at the second meeting of the Triennial Convention, the denomination decided to expand its efforts to ministerial education, and the Mississippi association endorsed this work as well.¹⁸

By 1819, the Mississippi Baptist Association had expanded into Louisiana and spread northward and eastward in Mississippi to include 41 churches with a total of 1,125 members. Nine of the churches did not send representatives in 1819 due to the vast distance covered; therefore, the Mississippi association agreed to form the Union Baptist Association in 1819 from eight churches north of the Homochitto River and, in 1820, the Pearl River Baptist Association from 15 churches east of the Pearl River. In 1820, the Mississippi association welcomed delegates from the Louisiana Baptist Association as guests, and a few churches in Louisiana remained in the Mississippi association until as late as 1842.¹⁹

African American and American Indian ministry

Mission work among two ethnic groups in Mississippi deserve attention: African Americans and American Indians. From the start, many of the Baptists of Mississippi were African American. Joseph Willis was born into slavery, the child of a Cherokee-African woman and her White enslaver, but he was emancipated in 1787. He came from South Carolina to Mississippi about 1798 or 1799 and participated in the organization of Bethel Baptist Church (Wilkinson) in 1800. He began a ministry at Bayou Chicot, south of Alexandria, Louisiana, in 1804 or 1805, and appealed to the Mississippi Baptist Association to ordain him. In 1812, Moses Hadley and Lawrence Scarborough were appointed by the Mississippi association to travel to Louisiana in order “to ordain bro. Willis in the Opelousas, and constitute a church.” From 1806 to 1813, Ebenezer Baptist Church (Amite) listed four “Africans” who joined, out of around 50 members. On December 8, 1815, the minutes of Ebenezer read, “Received by experience an African Ben belonging to Samuel Harrell.” (Samuel Harrell does not appear in the list of church members.) In 1821, Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson) had 28 White members, listed by full name, and 32 Black members, listed by first name only, under the names of their enslavers. None of the enslavers were members of Salem; the common practice was for slaveholders to give a written pass for enslaved people to attend worship. For example, the minutes at Salem on May 3, 1816, read, “Captain Doherty’s Phil came forward with his master’s written permission to join the church by experience.” Although enslaved people were bought and sold and transported from state to state, Baptist churches received them by letter from their former churches. In November 1816, the minutes of Sarepta Baptist Church (Franklin) read, “Bob & Ferby servants of Walter Sellers presented letters from Cape Fear Church in N. Carolina & was received.” Enslaved members of the church were disciplined in the same manner as White members; Sarepta’s minutes of December 1822 read, “Bro. Prather’s Rose (a servant) excluded by taking that which was not her own.” From this wording, it is likely that Walter Sellers was an enslaver but not a Baptist, whereas “Bro. Prather” likely was a member of Sarepta.²⁰

During the Antebellum era, most Black people worshiped with White people. However, there were a few Baptist churches that were exclusively

for Black people. The African Baptist Church (Claiborne), a member of the Mississippi Baptist Association, first appeared in the minutes of the association as a member church in 1813. It met at a sawmill belonging to Josiah Flowers, pastor of Bayou Pierre Baptist Church (Claiborne). In 1814, the African church sent a letter to the association, and in 1815 the association called on various White pastors to take turns preaching to the African church, which was by then using the meeting house of Bayou Pierre. Every year from 1816 to 1819, the African congregation sent two representatives to the associational meeting; these included Levi Thompson, Hezekiah Harmon (twice), E. Flower (thrice), William Cox, S. Goodwin, J. Flower, and W. Breazeale. In 1818, members of Bogue Chitto Baptist Church (Pike) granted “the Request of the Black Brethren to be constituted into a church.” And in 1822, members of Zion Hill Baptist Church (Amite) considered licensing Smart, an enslaved man, to “exercise his gift” to preach, but delayed their decision “in consequences of an Act passed in the legislature.”²¹ In 1822, the new state of Mississippi’s legislature had enacted a series of laws called the Poindexter Code; one of these was a law prohibiting enslaved people or even free people of color from assembling except under certain restricted conditions. The law was enacted out of fear of an insurrection, but it brought the Mississippi association into conflict with the state legislature. The law forced the African congregation to discontinue meeting; the association took up the cause and appointed a committee to prepare a memorial to be “laid before the next legislature of this State, praying the repeal of such parts of a state law thereof, as deprives the African churches, under the patronage of this Association, of their religious privileges and that Elder S. Marsh wait on the legislature with said memorial.” The legislature did not agree with the association, and the African congregation stopped meeting for a time, although the members were still welcome in the other churches led by White people.²²

In 1824, the state legislature heeded the complaints of the churches and revised the code to permit enslaved people to preach to others enslaved as long as the service was overseen by a White minister or attended by at least two White people appointed by a White church. In 1826, Zion Hill Baptist Church (Amite) allowed Smart to preach. The African Baptist Church joined the new Union Baptist Association after 1820, meeting as a separate congregation from Bayou Pierre. In 1828, African Baptist Church reported

75 members; its sponsor church at Bayou Pierre had 48 members. African was tied with Clear Creek Baptist Church, Washington (Adams) for the largest membership in the association.²³

In 1814, the Mississippi Baptist Association received a letter from African Baptist Church, stating “their case and the many difficulties they labor under.” The association instructed the church “to use their utmost diligence in obeying their masters, and that prior to their assembling together for worship, they be careful to obtain a written permission from their masters or overseers.” The association also expressed its “anxious wish” that “the ministering brethren” of the association would serve them and preach to them. In 1815, Carter Tarrant, an anti-slavery Baptist preacher from Kentucky and member of the anti-slavery organization Friends of Humanity, was a guest preacher at the Mississippi association. Tarrant had published a sermon against slavery a decade earlier, insisting it was the essence of hypocrisy to sign the Bill of Rights and consign Black people to bondage. The words of his sermon at the Mississippi association are not recorded.²⁴

In 1819, a committee of David Cooper, James A. Ranaldson, and William Snodgrass composed the circular letter on the subject of “Duty of Masters and Servants.” It stated: “In the order of Divine Providence ... God has given to some the pre-eminence over others.” It cited examples of masters and servants in scripture as evidence of this. Then they offered advice to enslavers. Quoting Colossians 4:1 and Leviticus 25:43, they told enslavers to “be just in your treatment,” and warned them against expecting labor from enslaved people that they were unable to do, because it “would be cruel and unjust.” They also told slaveholders that they were obligated to show kindness and compassion. Third, they said it was the “duty” of enslavers not only to care for the physical bodies of enslaved people, “but more especially that of their souls.” The letter then turned its attention to those in bondage, “as many of them are members of our churches.” Addressing enslaved people as “brethren,” the letter acknowledged that being enslaved was “dark, mysterious, and unpleasant,” yet claimed the institution had been “founded in wisdom and goodness.” The letter took the statement about Christ’s atonement in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 and implied that it referred to their purchase: “Remember you are not your own; you have been bought with a price, and your master is entitled to your best services. ... You must obey your earthly master with fear and trembling, whether

they are perverse and wicked, or pious and gentle.” The letter quoted scriptures instructing enslaved people to obey (Ephesians 6:5–7, Titus 2:9–10, 1 Peter 2:18 and 1 Timothy 6:1–2), while omitting passages against slavery, such as Exodus 21:16, Deuteronomy 23:15–16, Philemon 1:15–16 and 1 Timothy 1:10.²⁵

This circular letter was typical of how most White Southerners viewed slavery in the Antebellum period. White Baptists in Mississippi and across the Deep South spoke publicly against the abusive treatment of slaves, but in actual practice, they rarely intervened to prevent it. While Baptist church minutes frequently recorded discipline of members for drinking, gambling, and other moral failures, they rarely recorded any discipline of enslavers for mistreating enslaved people. This was partially because in the early 1800s, few Baptists owned slaves; this changed later in the Antebellum period, when it was more common for White Baptists to own slaves. Occasionally, Baptist churches investigated abuse of enslaved people. In 1858, Ebenezer excluded one of its members for killing a man who escaped slavery. What few records we have of Black Baptist voices on the issue were united against slavery. Riley Moore, formerly enslaved in Montgomery County, believed that White ministers who preached the biblical defense of slavery to enslaved congregations “ought to have been hung for preaching false doctrine. They was no such thing in the Bible.” Charlie Moses, a formerly enslaved man who was also a preacher, said, “The God Almighty has condemned him [his former enslaver] to eternal fire.”²⁶

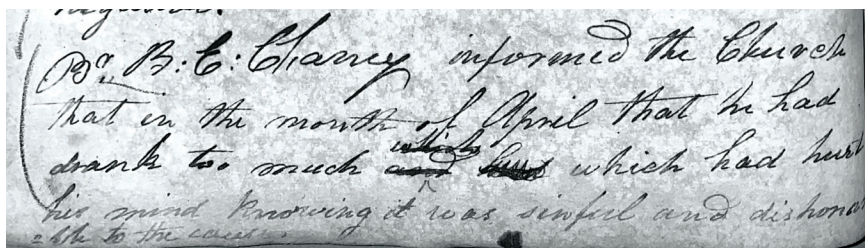
White Mississippi Baptists were also concerned with the local American Indian tribes. The White man wanted the American Indian lands, and the White Baptists also desired the conversion of their souls. In 1817, the association began an aggressive missionary policy by sending Thomas Mercer and Benjamin Davis to visit the Creek tribe to try to establish the gospel among them. The missionaries started out on their mission, but the project collapsed when Mercer died. Baptists in Kentucky started an academy for children of the Choctaw tribe in 1819, but it closed in 1821. In 1825, Richard Johnson, a Baptist leader in Kentucky, opened an academy for Choctaws in Mississippi in the district of Choctaw chief Mushulatubbee, between the present-day cities of Columbus and Meridian. Although the teachers’ motivation was to lead American Indians to faith in Christ, they had a condescending attitude toward Choctaw culture, stating they

hoped to “civilize” them. They met with some success among students, but the missionaries had little impact on adults in the tribe. A young female student wrote: “I do not know that one adult Choctaw has become a Christian. We all pray for them, but we cannot save them; and if they die where will they go? May the Lord pour out his Spirit upon the poor Choctaw people.” It would be many years before missions to the Choctaw tribe would have an impact.²⁷

No peace at Salem

Although its name meant “peace” in Hebrew, Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson), the mother church of Mississippi Baptists, suffered continual conflict. In 1811 the members tried to secure a title to the land on which they had built a meeting house, but they found it was on public property and so were unable to secure a title. They petitioned Congress for special legislation to enable them to purchase the land. Congress passed the necessary legislation, but President James Madison vetoed the bill on the grounds of “distinction between religion and civil government as essential to the purity of both” and reminded Salem that Baptists have “been more vigilant and consistent in maintaining that distinction.” The church resolved this when one of the members purchased the tract of land himself and then sold it to the church.²⁸

The internal problems at Salem were not so easily resolved. In 1815, church members had a disagreement so divisive that two separate factions in Salem sent letters to the association. The association appointed a committee to study the matter, and they recommended that they receive the letter from the faction represented by John Burch. A member named Bailey E. Chaney appears to have been the center of the controversy—the same Bailey Chaney who preached the first sermon in Natchez after the Spanish left and the son of William Chaney, the first deacon of Salem. It appears that the entire Chaney family was either disfellowshipped or stopped attending during the 1815 conflict. In March 1816, the congregation voted to “civilly demand our old church book” from Bailey Chaney, who kept the minutes from the earliest years in his personal possession. The next month, they reported that he refused to give them the book.²⁹



Mr B. E. Chaney informed the Church
that in the month of April that he had
drank to much ~~and~~ ^{which} ~~had~~ which had hurt
his mind knowing it was sinful and dishon-
or-able to the church.

Church clerk Bailey E. Chaney's confession "that in the month of April that he had drank too much," written in his own handwriting. Minutes, Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson), June 30, 1821. Photograph by Robert C. Rogers.



Stone marking the original location of Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson), Salem Church Rd., Fayette, MS. Photograph by Robert C. Rogers.

In February 1819, William Chaney asked forgiveness of the Salem congregation for "rending from the church," saying "he might be mistaken" regarding conflict between himself and other members. Several Chaney family members were restored at that time, but not Bailey Chaney. Finally, in June 1820, Bailey Chaney allowed church members to "partially examine" the old church book. He was restored to fellowship in September 1820, and he became church clerk again.³⁰

Sadly, the reconciliation only lasted a year before trouble arose again. On June 30, 1821, Bailey Chaney, then the church clerk, confessed that he "drank too much" in April, recording his own confession in the minutes. The church forgave him unanimously. However, in September 1822, his election as a representative to the association was rescinded because of charges of public drunkenness at the Franklin County Courthouse. On November 2, 1822, Pastor Daniel McCall "urged withdrawing fellowship from him for so scandalous a series of disorderly acts." Jacob Stampley agreed. William Chaney appealed to Matthew 18:21–22 for forgiveness for his son. The church was deadlocked in a tie vote. When the church revisited the

issue on January 4, 1823, they voted to forgive and restore Bailey Chaney, but the damage had been done. The Stampley and Chaney families did not reconcile, and more than half of the members left. The church struggled to survive, and on August 29, 1834, Salem voted to formally disband. A few years later, the church building was destroyed in an accidental fire. A historical foundation stone marks the location where the original congregation once met.³¹ The mother church of Mississippi Baptists had withstood years of religious persecution from without but could not withstand the moral failure and division caused by one man from within.

New leadership

By 1820, Baptists were firmly planted in the soil of Mississippi. Not all of the branches in the Mississippi Baptist tree would remain, but the roots were deep, and the tree was growing. New leaders were rising up to continue what Richard Curtis had begun. Moses Hadley, Thomas Mercer, David Cooper, and Ezra Courtney had all come from the east on a mission to work in Mississippi. They furnished important leadership for the Mississippi Baptist Association during its formative period, even as Curtis stepped aside.

It is unclear why Richard Curtis faded from Baptist leadership after the association was organized in 1807. It may have been that Curtis had reservations about forming the association or that he had some broken relationship with Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson), his former church, since he never attended the meetings held there, whereas he did attend other associational meetings when they were not held at Salem. It seems most likely, however, that Curtis wanted to leave the work to others. Historian Jesse L. Boyd described him this way: "Unostentatious in manner, Richard Curtis, Jr., was willing to do his part in the quiet walks of life. ... He was not a man of very conspicuous ability as compared with some of his brethren of the old Mississippi Association." He did not have the education and training of some of the new leaders, like David Cooper, who was a medical doctor. In addition, he had grown ill from cancer, from which he died on October 28, 1811, at the home of a friend where he was seeking medical treatment. Curtis had quietly attended the associational meeting a few days before, on

October 19, at his church, New Hope Baptist Church (Adams). Curtis was buried at his friend's home on Beaver Creek in Amite County, and a large tombstone was erected there. There is also a marble obelisk about a mile east of this tombstone, in the cemetery of Ebenezer Baptist Church (Amite). Sixty-five years after his death, in 1876, the Mississippi Baptist Convention honored the memory of Richard Curtis, Jr., with the presentation of a special gavel for use by the convention president, made from wood taken from the site of Salem Baptist Church. The gavel was unvarnished, "to signify that the pioneer Baptists it represents had no varnish on them."³²

Moses Hadley, pastor of New Hope Baptist Church (Adams) and Bethel Baptist Church (Wilkinson), was active in the Mississippi Baptist Association. He preached the first sermon at the first associational meeting, and he was the first moderator of the association. He was called "the peace-maker." If two neighbors were enemies, he would not rest until they became friends. He wrote the circular letter in 1812 encouraging churches to cooperate with one another. He came to the Mississippi Territory in 1806 and died in 1818.³³

Thomas Mercer was another active participant. He came from Georgia



Left: Tombstone of Richard Curtis, Jr., on Beaver Creek, Amite County; photograph by John Mark Vincent. Right: Obelisk in memory of Richard Curtis, Jr., Ebenezer Baptist Church (Amite) cemetery. Photograph by Robert C. Rogers.

and probably arrived in the territory in 1807, working alongside Moses Hadley at Bethel; he then served New Providence Baptist Church (Amite) and Zion Hill Baptist Church (Amite) and became active in the association. He wrote the circular letter in 1808, a short, passionate appeal to renewal called "The Barren Fig Tree." In it, he bemoaned the "deplorable situation" of so few additions to the churches, spoke of his former life with "a heart as cold as ice," and asked, "Is it not high time to awake out of sleep?" He urged: "Brethren in the ministry, arise like one man, and exert yourselves in the cause of your Lord and Master. Sound the alarm in the holy mountain. Go forth, ye heralds of the Lamb, proclaiming the Savior's dying love. Pray fervently, preach the word faithfully, as those who feel its power and believe its truths." Mercer compiled a collection of hymns, which was used widely. He was designated by the association for missionary work among the Creeks and died on a journey to reach them.³⁴

Dr. David Cooper was a physician, pastor, and natural leader. He came to Mississippi from Ebenezer Baptist Church, Florence, South Carolina, where he was pastor at the time that Richard Curtis fled there in exile. In 1802, he came to Mississippi Territory and was listed as pastor of Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson) in the associational minutes until 1811. After that, he appeared to have settled at Woodville and stepped back from pastoring. He took the role of elder statesman, and he was enlisted to write the circular letter in 1815 and 1823 and served as moderator and keynote preacher for the association multiple times between 1816 and 1822. In 1823, he was a delegate from Shiloh Baptist Church (Wilkinson). After Salem had a split in 1823, Cooper stepped forward to pastor Salem from 1824 until his death in 1830. Cooper was elected as the first president of the Mississippi State Baptist Convention in 1824. He was prominent in society; he married the widow of C. C. Claiborne, the first governor of the Mississippi Territory. His death on March 22, 1830, was mourned by the Mississippi Baptist Association as "our dearly beloved and venerable Dr. D. Cooper" and mourned by Salem for "the great loss which this Church and the community at large has sustained."³⁵

Ezra Courtney was perhaps the most enigmatic and confrontational leader among the early Baptists in Mississippi. Born in 1771 in Pennsylvania, he came to Mississippi from Ebenezer Baptist Church, Florence, South Carolina, and was a founding member of Ebenezer Baptist Church

(Amite). He was ordained by Curtis at Ebenezer, and Curtis turned over the leadership of the church to him in 1807. Several incidents in his life revealed him to be a strong-willed and intimidating man. Soon after becoming pastor at Ebenezer, he was accused of “imprudent behavior” toward a young woman, but he denied the charge and confronted his accusers, who were then disciplined by the church. He was chairman of the Mississippi Baptist Association’s committee that, in 1814, was charged with considering a more moderate doctrinal statement on election; however, at his recommendation, the association maintained a firm Calvinist statement and strengthened it with scripture. In 1815 he served on a committee to settle an internal church dispute at Half Moon Baptist Church in Washington Parish, Louisiana. His handling of the dispute at Half Moon may have attracted the attention of Hepzibah Baptist Church in East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, which called him to be their pastor in 1816. In 1817, he participated in associational efforts to mediate the church split at Salem. The Mississippi Baptist Association called on him several times to edit or cowrite letters, to preach, to serve as moderator, and to serve on numerous committees. In 1824, he was one of the men elected from the association to a meeting to discuss the formation of a Baptist state convention. Beginning about 1838, he was involved in a conflict with Hepzibah church, the origins of which are unclear from the historical records. All that is known is that Courtney complained to the association of the church’s “corrupt and unjust conduct toward him,” and the next year Hepzibah complained to the association “that the Jackson church [Louisiana] had received and retained in her fellowship Elder E. Courtney whom she had previously excluded.” Ezra Courtney died in 1855. Not afraid to face controversy, he had a long and prolific ministry in both Mississippi and Louisiana.³⁶

Chapter 3

The First Attempt at a State Convention *1820 – 1835*

The national scene from 1820 to 1836 began with the Era of Good Feelings and ended in the Panic of 1837. Similarly, the Baptists of Mississippi began this period with growth and optimism but fell into conflict and division.

The United States was developing a strong sense of nationalism that gave its citizens pride and confidence. Thomas Jefferson's political philosophy was carried to its triumphal conclusion under the administration of Andrew Jackson. As a result, the common White man gained power.

In Mississippi, the White citizens were primarily concerned with acquiring the lands held by the American Indian tribes, particularly the Choctaws in the middle of the state and the Chickasaws in the north. This acquisition was achieved through the Treaty of Doak's Stand in 1820, the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830, and the Treaty of Pontotoc in 1832. These cessions provided for the removal of the American Indians to reservations west of the Mississippi River. The vast area acquired by these treaties was a fertile, cotton-producing district that provided a lure for settlers. By 1807, cotton was already the chief crop of the Natchez region. The population of the state increased from 75,448 people in 14 counties in 1820 to 375,651 people in 60 counties in 1840; by 1839, the Mississippi cotton crop was the largest in the nation.¹

The Mississippi culture that developed was one of extremes, crowning cotton as king and enshrining the slavery of African Americans as a protected institution. The financing of cotton production required long-term credit, increasing the presence of speculative banks that would later fail. Transporting the crop to market was a challenge. The Mississippi River and other streams offered cheap transportation, but many valuable farmlands were far from navigable streams, and the cotton had to be hauled over inadequate roads to the landings. The railroad made its first appearance in the state in 1831, seeming to answer the need for efficient transportation.

The political leadership of Mississippi reflected the prevailing Jacksonian philosophy. In 1821, the state capital was moved to Jackson, named after General Andrew Jackson, the hero of the Battle of New Orleans. Jackson was in Hinds County, named for General Thomas Hinds of Mississippi, who fought alongside Andrew Jackson. The constitution of Mississippi was rewritten in 1832 to give the state a more democratic form of government; it provided that most officers, including judges, should be elected by free White male citizens. Perhaps the most influential Baptist political leader of the time was George Poindexter, the son of a Baptist minister and a member of Woodville Baptist Church, Woodville (Wilkinson). He was successively a member of Congress, a judge, governor, and United States senator.²

The rise of religious societies

Reaping the benefits of the Second Great Awakening, many new religious societies were formed in America during this period, including the American Bible Society, organized in 1816; the Sunday School Union in 1824; the American Tract Society in 1825; the American Society for Promoting Temperance in 1826; the American Home Missionary Society in 1826; and the American Peace Society in 1828. Foreshadowing future events, these societies were sandwiched between the organization of two interdenominational organizations, the American Colonization Society (to send freed Black people back to Africa) in 1816 and the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833. Further, the separate religious denominations were organizing regional and national groups to become more effective.

In 1814, the year Baptists organized the Triennial Convention, there were fewer than 120 Baptist associations in the United States, comprising 2,000 churches, 1,500 ministers, and 160,000 communicants. By 1830, the Baptists numbered 313,138, and in 1850, Baptists claimed 815,212 communicants. They were the second-largest Protestant denomination in the United States after Methodists.³

New associations and state conventions organized

By 1819, the Mississippi Baptist Association's numerical and geographical growth made it difficult for members to stay connected, as it numbered 41 churches and more than 1,125 members. The association covered the entire 14-county area of Mississippi that was settled at that time. This prompted the formation of two new associations in 1820, the Union Baptist Association and the Pearl River Baptist Association.⁴

The Union Baptist Association was organized in September 1820 at Bayou Pierre Baptist Church (Claiborne) near Port Gibson with eight churches, including the mother church, Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson), and a new church in the town of Natchez. Prominent leaders of the Union association included David Cooper, D. McCall, L. Scarborough, John Burch, Elisha Flowers, and Nathaniel Perkins. One of its first actions was to create a fund for traveling preachers, and "Brother John Smith is requested to travel for one year, and preach the gospel, as our missionary, through the state." For this mission work, they paid him \$10.⁵

The Pearl River Baptist Association organized at Fair River Baptist Church (Lincoln) in November 1820 with 23 churches, which included 14 churches from the Mississippi Baptist Association as well as other churches that had never been in an association. The host church, Fair River, had organized in 1815 a few miles west of the Pearl River, but the new association included many churches east of the Pearl River in southeast Mississippi, a part of the state rapidly growing in population. By 1836, there were 33 churches and 982 members in the Pearl River association; among its new churches was an African church. The first moderator and prominent leader of this association was Norvell Robertson, Sr., pastor of Providence Baptist Church (Forrest), founded in 1818 a few miles north of the location of the

present-day city of Hattiesburg.⁶

Early Baptist leaders of the Triennial Convention, like Richard Furman of South Carolina, the first president of the Triennial Convention, hoped that the convention would expand to multiple ministries, such as home missions and ministerial education. This increased interest in organization led to the formation of many Baptist conventions at the state level. South Carolina organized a Baptist state convention in 1821, Georgia in 1822, Virginia in 1823, and Alabama, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Mississippi, and Vermont in 1824.⁷

The rise and fall of the Mississippi Baptist State Convention, 1824-29

In 1823, the Pearl River association invited the Union association and Mississippi association to form a statewide organization. Both associations accepted; thus, the Mississippi Baptist State Convention was organized at Bogue Chitto Baptist Church (Pike) in February 1824. A constitution was written, and the second session was held the same year, in November 1824 at East Fork Baptist Church (Amite). Dr. David Cooper was elected president, and officers were elected representing each of the associations.⁸

The newly formed Mississippi Baptist State Convention appeared to have had a successful launch. All three associations were on board, and three of its members were engaged to do mission work in the state “under the patronage of this body.” A Mississippi Baptist Missionary Society had formed, but they gave all their funds to the new state convention and threw their support behind the effort.⁹

The 1824 circular letter from the state convention reflected on the vision of the new body, but it also revealed the trouble brewing: “This Convention has but one primary object in view, namely, the diffusion of the light of the glorious Gospel.” The letter explained that to accomplish this object, four means were needed: Bible distribution, tract distribution, the labors of missionaries, and the education of ministers. The letter went into detail to defend the need for missionaries and the need for ministerial education, anticipating arguments against them. Unfortunately for the convention, many churches rejected these arguments. By 1829, the Mississippi Baptist

State Convention had dissolved.¹⁰

The attack on the new convention came from two sides: One came from the “Campbellites,” associated with Alexander Campbell, who would later form the Disciples of Christ and Churches of Christ. The second attack came from the anti-missions movement, associated with Daniel Parker and John Taylor; some supporters of this movement would later organize the strongly Calvinistic Primitive Baptist churches. Controversy with both the Campbellites and the anti-missions movement raged among Baptist churches in America in the 1820s and 1830s. A resolution of the Mississippi Baptist Association in 1833 expressed these dual concerns: “Resolved, unanimously, that this Association discountenance and will not fellowship, or knowingly commune with any church or individual member who holds the doctrines or dogmas held by the Christian Baptists, *alias*, the Campbellites: and also, those held by Elder Parker, *alias*, the two seed doctrine, so far as relates the eternal existence of the devil, and his being literally the father of a certain portion of the human family.”¹¹

Daniel Parker, John Taylor, and the anti-missions movement

The anti-missions movement can be attributed mainly to two men: Daniel Parker and John Taylor. Parker was reared on the frontier of Georgia and later went to Indiana. He lacked education but made up for it with enthusiasm. Parker taught a unique form of Hyper-Calvinism called “Two Seed in the Spirit,” teaching that some people are born of “good seed” from God, and are the elect, whereas others are born as children of the devil, or “bad seed.” He was fervently opposed to missions, education, and Sunday schools. Taylor was an outspoken pastor in Kentucky who frequently attended Baptist associations to persuade them against missions. In his pamphlet “Thoughts on Missions,” he criticized missions as being contrary to the Baptist system of autonomous church government since missionaries were sent out by societies and boards, and he said that the chief interest of the missionaries and mission societies was to get money from people who could not afford it.¹²

Parker’s two-seed doctrine was more sensational, but it was Taylor’s teachings that gained more traction among Mississippi Baptists. One who

espoused Taylor's views was John Erwin (identified in some sources as Joseph Erwin) of New Hope Baptist Church (Adams). Erwin was one of the original representatives at the formation of the Mississippi Baptist Association, but he later became a Primitive Baptist. In 1839, Erwin wrote, "The enemy began to make inroads upon us by sending young theologians from the Academies as missionaries. ... Another Babel or Castle built in the air, was the Mississippi Baptist State Convention [which required] ... pecuniary remittances to support theological schools ..." In 1839, Erwin was a founding member of the Primitive Baptist Association that organized among churches in Holmes and Attala counties. Their doctrinal statement was almost exactly the same as the Mississippi association; thus, they did not promote Parker's two-seed doctrine. However, the Primitive Baptist Association's first circular letter clearly stated its anti-missionary views: "We protest against Missionary Tract, Sunday School, and Temperance Societies—not because we are opposed to the spread of the gospel, but because our Lord has not commanded any such thing. ... We cannot fellowship your theological schools. ... If He wants a learned Moses, or a Saul of Tarsus, He will have them qualified before he calls them to his work. ... There was no Missionary Society for them to run to for money to buy fine horses and fine dressing. ... Surely you must have a great thirst for money, that you should beg it in the name of converting the heathen!"¹³

The circular letter of the Mississippi Baptist State Convention in 1824 replied to the anti-missions critics point by point. First, it dealt with the doctrinal objection to missions. "Should there be any who feel opposed to Missions, we wish them to reflect for a moment on the ... faithful missionaries of the first century, the benefit of whose labours was experienced throughout the whole Roman Empire. But should it still be asked, Why all this labour and expense in the cause of missions? Is not God able to save lost sinners, without all this toil and expense. For answer we refer you to the command of Him who came to seek and to save them that were lost: 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.' ... For how shall they hear without a Preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?"

Regarding the "education of pious young men called of God to preach the Gospel," the circular letter acknowledged that "it will be opposed by many who mean well and whose motives are pure." The letter said they

were nevertheless in error, for the preacher “should be a workman who need not be ashamed, let his avocation be what it may. As there is no calling or avocation of so much importance as preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ, none which involves so great responsibility. ... It is desirable that the qualifications of the Ministers of Christ should correspond with the importance and extent of their commission ...” Seeking to offer a compromise with those who opposed formal study of Greek and Hebrew, the letter appealed for the minimal education for ministers: “We do not say that it is necessary that every minister of the Gospel should understand the dead languages; but we do say, that he ought to understand the language wherein he was born.” Anticipating and restating the arguments of people like Taylor, the letter admitted, “We know it is said, there are many able and useful preachers of the gospel who are unlearned—that Christ is able to qualify his preachers without sending them to school. ... All this is admitted, and we rejoice that there are many able and useful ministers of the New Testament, who have never been at College, nor even at a Grammar School.” However, the letter noted that the prophet Samuel was “educated and instructed in the law by Eli ... it is entirely probable that, the Schools of the prophets were founded under his administration. ... These schools still existed in the days of Elijah.” Clearly, the letter-writer knew he was trying to persuade a resistant audience, yet he insisted, “We must conclude, that Scripture, reason, and experience, bear their united testimony in favor of such an education as will make a gospel minister more acceptable, and more extensively useful.”¹⁴

The 1824 letter of the Mississippi Baptist State Convention went to great lengths to defend missions and even greater lengths to defend ministerial education, indicating what an uphill battle the leaders of this upstart convention faced. They knew well that new Baptist settlers were influenced by the anti-missions movement. In fact, in 1825, the anti-missionary Buttahatchie Association of Primitive Baptists was organized in the territories ceded by the Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes in Mississippi and Alabama. It never corresponded with the other associations in the state and never affiliated with the new state convention.¹⁵

Joseph Erwin described the fall of the Mississippi Baptist State Convention with this mixed metaphor: “After the same had progressed a little, and got so it looked like it might stand on its legs, its features and forms could

be more minutely discovered. ... And now down comes the building to the ground, because it could not live without money. ... The Primitive Baptist Association to which I belong has closed her doors against the above train of speculative notions, or moneyed institutions of the day.”¹⁶

While the anti-missions movement resisted the state convention, a bigger blow to Baptist work in this time period came from another source. Even the Primitive Baptist Joseph Erwin saw the other source as more divisive, saying that churches and associations “were torn to pieces, and have never regained their former standing” because of Campbellism.¹⁷

Alexander Campbell and the Reformers

The Campbellites took their name from their founder, Alexander Campbell, although they preferred to call themselves the Reformers. Campbell was a native of Ireland, born of a French Huguenot mother, reared in Scotland, and educated at the University of Glasgow. He immigrated to the United States in 1809. He was described by historian John T. Christian as “educated, fearless in his investigations, encyclopaedic in his learning, with great natural ability and a comprehensive command of English, he was a debater of unusual power.”¹⁸ Although he was reared in the Presbyterian church, he was welcomed into the Baptist faith after he came to America. Campbell’s great oratory and successful arguments won thousands of converts. He extended his ministry through publication of his magazine, *The Christian Baptist*. Although he called himself a Baptist, the emphasis was on “Christian,” and he enjoyed calling himself a Reformer. As early as 1823, he began to teach that “the water of baptism formally washes away our sins.” Redstone Baptist Association of Pennsylvania, of which Campbell was a member, took formal action against him in 1825-26 because of his statement about baptism. In 1829, he dropped the Baptist name by establishing a new publication, *The Millennial Harbinger*. On July 5, 1830, there appeared in *The Millennial Extra* his article on “Remission of Sins.” In this issue, Campbell declared unequivocally that “immersion is the converting act”—that “immersion and regeneration are two Bible names for the same act.” Its publication seems to have marked the beginning of the separation of the Baptists from the followers of Campbell. Baptists agreed with Camp-

bell that immersion was the proper mode of baptism, but they disagreed that baptism or any other ritual could save one's soul. Baptists saw this as a violation to the key Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone. In 1830, numerous Baptist associations all over the United States, including Mississippi, excluded or denounced the teaching of Campbellites, and Campbell's followers began to adopt the name Disciples of Christ. They also used the term "Christian church," which was the preference of Campbell's associate, Barton W. Stone.¹⁹

In Mississippi, among Campbell's enthusiastic followers were Jacob Creath and his son (whose name is not recorded), both Baptist ministers who migrated to Mississippi. These men were powerful exponents of the Campbell doctrines and won a large following. James A. Ranaldson, who had been a delegate to every session of the Mississippi State Baptist Convention, accepted Campbell's views. An Alabama Baptist minister, William E. Matthews, moved to Mississippi in 1828 and within a year had persuaded three Baptist congregations to adopt Campbellite views: Ebenezer Baptist Church (Wilkinson), Mount Moriah Baptist Church (Wilkinson), and Wells Creek Baptist Church (Franklin). In 1839, Alexander Campbell himself visited Mississippi, preaching at Woodville, Natchez, and elsewhere. Looking back on the matter in 1850, J. F. H. Claiborne, the nephew of Dr. David Cooper, recalled how Cooper responded to the teachings of Campbell. Cooper heard about Campbell from the Creaths, who "made their home with Dr. Cooper," and he shared their enthusiasm for Campbell's skill in debating for the Baptist cause. "Subsequently, as Mr. Campbell gradually and cautiously began to develop his creed, Dr. Cooper took exceptions to it. I have often heard him do so in conversations with ministers at his house, and it was his habit to read Mr. Campbell's papers to me, and to point out what he conceived to be erroneous."²⁰

Ranaldson, who shared Campbell's views, was a representative from Mars Hill Baptist Church (Amite) to the meeting of the Mississippi association from October 15 to 17, 1830, where the association passed a resolution condemning Campbellism. It stated, "The writings of Alexander Campbell have exerted what we consider a mischievous influence on a number of churches." The resolution enumerated what they believed to be the false doctrines of Campbell, including that there was "no promise of salvation without baptism" and "no direct operation of the Holy Spirit on

the mind, prior to baptism.” It also stated that “obedience places it in God’s power to elect to salvation” and that “no creed is necessary for the church, but the scriptures as they stand.” The association approved of the action of other associations in withdrawing fellowship from Campbell and his supporters for these doctrines and recommended “to discountenance the writings of said Alexander Campbell” and “not to countenance” the new translation of the New Testament that had been edited by Campbell that they deemed was “calculated to mislead, spread the leaven of heresy, sow the seeds of discord, and thus mar the peace of the churches.” After this, Ranaldson was not a delegate to any other meetings of the association, and in 1835, the Mississippi association disfellowshipped him: “J. A. Ranaldson, formerly known as a regular Baptist preacher among us, has embraced views contrary to those held by us; therefore, resolved, that he no longer be considered as one of our order.”²¹

Pearl River association also stood against Campbellism. In 1830, it bemoaned the “confusion and separation of churches and Associations that has taken place, by the writing and translation of the New Testament, by Alexander Campbell.” They detailed the same doctrines that had been listed by the Mississippi association and resolved “that this Association cordially unite, to oppose the above creed and translation in our pulpits and families, as we believe it to be contrary to the word of spirit of God.”²²

Union association’s minutes from 1829 to 1840 are missing, but churches in that association were affected by the controversy. In 1835, soon after Ashley Vaughn arrived in Mississippi to pastor Clear Creek Baptist Church (Adams), he wrote about the destitution of Baptist churches due to the Campbellites. Vaughn reported that Fellowship Baptist Church (Jefferson) “has passed through numerous and varied scenes of trial” due to “those who ostentatiously call themselves *Reformers*.” He continued: “Men several years ago came among them professedly in the character of regular Baptist ministers, enlisting their feelings and winning their affections, and they by their guise of orthodoxy removing from the minds all apprehension of danger, and sowed among them the seeds of heresy, discord and destruction. ... Indeed, it has become quite fashionable to *make Christians by trickery* ...” In May 1839, Sarepta Baptist Church (Franklin) voted not to recognize “baptism under the Campbellite faith,” a clear indication of how sharp the division had become.²³

Vaughn vividly described how the Campbellite controversy nearly destroyed the Baptist churches in Wilkinson County. He wrote, “Bethel church is four miles from Woodville; their meeting house is a very indifferent building; their number is small, not more than two or three male members, several of their members having gone over to the Reformers.” When Woodville Baptist Church, Woodville (Wilkinson), was reorganized in 1853, the minutes said, “There had once been a Baptist Church in this place and in the neighborhood, both of which had been afflicted more or less with the leaven of Campbellism ...”²⁴

Other factors may have contributed to the failure of the first state Baptist convention in Mississippi. Perhaps it was too early to start a convention with only three associations in the state, with two of those associations organized only four years prior. Nevertheless, Baptist historian Jesse L. Boyd concluded, “The first Baptist State Convention had to be abandoned, partially on this account”—that is, on the account of the twin controversies of anti-missions and Campbellism.²⁵

Other controversies

In addition to controversies over missions and Campbellism, churches debated other issues, such as the sale and consumption of liquor. During the 1820s and 1830s, Baptists gradually took a stronger stand against liquor. In 1820, Providence Baptist Church (Forrest) discussed the question, “Is it lawful, according to scripture, for a member of a church to retail spiritous liquors?” The church could not agree on a position. However, in 1826, the influential Congregationalist pastor Lyman Beecher began a series of sermons against the dangers of drunkenness. He called on Christians to sign pledges to abstain from alcohol, igniting the temperance movement in America. The question came before the Mississippi association in 1827, and the association stated that it “considers drunkenness one of the most injurious and worst vices in the community.” In 1830, the Pearl River association admonished any churches hosting their meetings: “Provide no ardent spirits for the Association when she may hereafter meet, as we do not want it.” In 1831, Pearl River association thanked the host church for obeying their request, and in 1832, the association humbly prayed for “the

public, that they will not come up to our Association with their beer, Cider, Cakes, and Mellons, as they greatly disturb the congregation.” Likewise in 1832, the Mississippi association resolved, “that this Association do discountenance all traffic in spirituous liquors, beer, cider, or bread, within such a distance of our meetings as in any wise disturb our peace and worship; and we do, therefore, earnestly request all persons to refrain from the same.”²⁶

The participation of church members in the Masonic lodge became a serious issue in several churches. Suspicion of secret societies, especially Freemasonry, was strong all over the country, especially among people who suspected a plot to control the government by the elite who were in such societies. When that loyalty to the Masons seemed greater than or contrary to the church, it was opposed. In 1818, the Mississippi association debated a query from Bayou Pierre Baptist Church (Claiborne) as to whether to continue fellowship with a brother “who prefers the rights and privileges of the Masonic Lodge to the communion of the church.” The association’s answer was no. This became a sensational issue in 1827, when William Morgan of New York was abducted and murdered, allegedly for exposing Masonic secrets. John G. Jones, a Methodist historian who defended Masonry, wrote of this “controversy which prevailed in the second and third decades of the [19th] century in many of the Baptist Churches in Mississippi, on the subject of Free Masonry. ... They lost, at least for a time, some of their best members, who either withdrew or were excluded, as the result of this controversy.” One such instance of the Masonic controversy was the case of James Simmons. Providence “requested him to withdraw from the Lodge which he refused to do. In consequence of his refusing to obey the church he was excluded from membership with us.”²⁷

More than anything else, controversies arose in churches over personality disputes and morality, as Baptist churches in Mississippi maintained strict discipline over their members. Henry Nichols was excluded from Sarepta Baptist Church (Franklin) “for drawing his knife and offering to stab his brother and for spitting in his face.” Jane Scarborough, wife of Rev. Lawrence Scarborough of Sarepta, accused “Sister Harris” of being drunk at a wedding and for hosting “Negro balls” (debutante balls for Black people). In response, the church charged Mrs. Scarborough of gossip without evidence and excluded her for making the accusations.²⁸

Benjamin Brown was excluded from Ebenezer Baptist Church (Amite) for “attending a horse race and wagering thereon.” In 1828, the African Baptist Church (Claiborne) at Bayou Pierre had a query for the Union association: “Is it gospel order for a Baptist church to hold members in fellowship who have married relations nearer than cousins?” The association answered that it was not.²⁹

James Dermaid was excluded from Providence for “disputing, quarreling, and using profane language, and absenting himself from the church.” Providence also excluded “brother Alexander Williams and sister Leuizer Maclimore upon a charge of their attempting to go off and cohabit together as man and wife.”³⁰

Not all issues were divisive, though. The ceremonial washing of one another’s feet was greatly discussed among Mississippi Baptists in the early 1800s as a new practice (although it had been practiced by General Baptists as early as the 1600s) and readily adopted, without controversy. Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson) first discussed the “propriety or impropriety” of “washing the saints’ feet” in April 1819 and voted in June 1819 to begin the practice. Many other churches followed suit. In 1821, Providence decided to practice foot washing at their yearly meeting and “any other time or place as duty and convenience may suggest.”³¹

Despite these many challenges faced by Baptists in the 1820s and 1830s, churches were being organized rapidly in newly populated areas of the state, and new associations with them: the Buttahatchie association was organized in 1825, the Leaf River association in 1829, the Yazoo association in 1833, the Choctaw association in 1834, and the Yalobusha association in 1836. The rapid growth in newly settled areas of east-central and north Mississippi is illustrated in Choctaw County, which did not have a single Baptist church in 1830, but by 1834 the Choctaw Baptist Association had organized with 34 churches, 18 ministers, and 1,000 members.³² Ashley Vaughn, the same pastor who had observed the shipwreck of the first state convention, was ready to rally this growing number of Baptists in Mississippi into a state convention again.

Chapter 4

The State Convention Survives Tough Times

1836 – 1846

The small gathering on Christmas Eve, 1836, at Clear Creek Baptist Church, Washington (Adams), was not there to celebrate Jesus's birth. Most of them were not even members of Clear Creek. Rather, the ten men present were busy writing a constitution for the Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the State of Mississippi, later known simply as the Mississippi Baptist Convention (MBC). They came with the endorsement of many who sent them, determined to start a Baptist movement that would last.

The decade from the founding of MBC to the organization of the Southern Baptist Convention was a period when national events impacted every pulpit and every congregation. The first of these events was the Panic of 1837, the economic depression that brought hardship on church ministry. The second was a revolt by enslaved people and the growing abolitionist movement that led to a split between the South and the North in the Triennial Convention of Baptists. Despite these difficulties, it was between 1836 and 1846 that Mississippi Baptists successfully organized a state convention.

Ashley Vaughn calls for a new state convention

The leader who inspired Mississippi Baptists to action was Ashley

Vaughn. This dedicated Baptist minister was born around 1807 and came to Mississippi in 1833 “compelled by ill health and on the advice of physicians” after a two-year pastorate in New York. He became pastor of Clear Creek Baptist Church, Washington (Adams) on December 12, 1834. He presented letters for membership for himself and his wife from the Particular Baptist Church, Gibbonsville and West Troy, New York, just north of Albany.¹

Although Vaughn did not come to the Natchez District as an officially appointed missionary, he did take on that role. He visited the Baptist churches in the area and reported in a letter to the journal *American Baptist* that the churches were barren. He blamed this condition on the migration of settlers to the land recently vacated by the American Indians in North Mississippi, as well as the inroads made by the Disciples of Christ. Vaughn immediately set about correcting this situation. In addition to preaching at Clear Creek in January 1836, he began preaching at the site of the defunct Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson). In March 1836, Clear Creek purchased a parsonage for \$1,500. By the 1836 Union association meeting, Clear Creek was the only church not complaining of struggles. With 115 members, it was the only Baptist church in the state of Mississippi that reported more than 100 members that year.²

In September, Vaughn began publishing the *Southwestern Religious Luminary* at Natchez, the first Baptist newspaper in Mississippi. The first issue of the paper called for the organization of a state convention to “combine the counsels, concentrate the energies, and unite the efforts of the denomination.” Vaughn traveled 400 to 500 miles on horseback that autumn to associational meetings to get support for a state convention, and he was so successful that the Mississippi Baptist Association suggested a gathering at Vaughn’s church in December 1836 so that “the Baptists of this State should meet in convention by delegation, to take into consideration the adoption of some systematic plan, by which the efforts of our denomination may be united.”³

In calling for a revived state convention, Vaughn anticipated concerns that a convention might usurp local church autonomy. He affirmed that a proposed convention would have no dictatorial authority over churches or associations, yet he pointed out that many states had already organized conventions and that they had proved beneficial to the denomination’s



Meeting house of Clear Creek Baptist Church, Washington (Adams), built in 1828. The Mississippi Baptist Convention was organized here in 1836. The congregation dissolved in the 1880s, and the building was later demolished. *Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission.*

work. Vaughn specifically listed the benefits of promoting the religious education of “pious young men” who were “called of God to preach the Gospel, the support of missionary service among the destitute, both at home and abroad; the establishment of Sabbath schools, and the promotion of religious education in families,” and any other general programs to benefit the churches.⁴

Organization of the Mississippi Baptist Convention

A small group of delegates gathered at Clear Creek Baptist Church, Washington (Adams), on December 23–24, 1836. Arriving the first day

were: N. R. Granberry from Palestine Baptist Church (Hinds); Ashley Vaughn from Clear Creek; R. G. Green from Lexington (location unknown); and Lee Compeer, S. S. Lattimore, T. S. N. King, and Lewis B. Holloway from Bethel Baptist Association. The next day, three more delegates arrived: Abraham Buckels from Clear Creek and Levi Elmore and Franklin M’Gill from Fellowship Baptist Church (Jefferson). These 10 men organized the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi. The delegates got to work immediately, unanimously approving a constitution (available in Appendix D of this book), electing officers, electing a delegate to the Triennial Convention, passing resolutions, and taking up an offering of “near two hundred dollars.”⁵

Although the group was small, it was influential. Three of the founding delegates—Vaughn, Granberry, and Holloway—would be future presidents of the convention; another, Lattimore, would later serve as an agent of the convention. They assumed the support of many others not in attendance, as evidenced by the fact that these 10 men elected 40 men to positions of office as well as a board of directors. This included one man, Benjamin Whitfield, who was not in attendance, who would later serve as convention president. The group directed Ashley Vaughn to publish 700 copies of their proceedings, indicating the size of the audience they expected.

The meeting places of the convention during its first decade reveal the widespread involvement it received from Baptists around the state. After the organizational meeting at Clear Creek Baptist Church (Adams) in 1836, the convention met successively at Palestine Baptist Church (Hinds), Hepzibah Baptist Church (Lawrence), Middleton Baptist Church (Carroll), Wahalak Baptist Church (Kemper), Brandon Baptist Church, Brandon (Rankin), Tocshish Baptist Church (Pontotoc), Mound Bluff Baptist Church (Madison), Palestine Baptist Church (Hinds), Grenada Baptist Church, Grenada (Yalobusha), and Fellowship Baptist Church (Jefferson). Travel to such a variety of locations was difficult in those days. The first charter for a railroad in Mississippi, in 1831, was only a short line in the southwest corner of the state, from Woodville to St. Francisville, Louisiana. The rail line from Vicksburg to Jackson was completed late in 1840. Thus, in the first decade of the convention, the only options most Baptists had to travel were by horseback or horse-drawn carriage, which was time-consuming, as evidenced by a trip catalogued in the *Mississipp-*

pian on October 18, 1836, in which J. R. Jefferson traveled by stagecoach from Vicksburg to Jackson, a journey of 46 miles which took 15 hours. A resolution at the 1844 convention reflected these slow travel conditions by calling for a committee to select a centralized location for the next meeting.⁶

In those early days, a typical state convention met sometime in May or June for five days, a time when farmers had already planted their crops and weather was warm enough to travel. The convention usually opened its first session on a Friday morning with an introductory sermon, followed by recognizing delegates and receiving letters of communication. They elected officers, and the president appointed committees. Saturday was also a day of hearing sermons and conducting business, usually centered around handling petitions from churches and associations and reports from committees. Sunday held many sermons given by the visiting ministers; churches of other Protestant faiths even opened their pulpits to Baptist preachers for this occasion. The convention resumed business meetings on Monday and Tuesday and held a final session on Wednesday morning. With the time required to travel, participation in a state convention was a commitment of at least a full week.

The organizers of the first state convention learned from the previous failed attempt, and they were better prepared for opposition. The constitution of the new convention hoped to disarm the opponents of the organization with a strong affirmation of local church autonomy before opponents could begin their attacks. Article IV reads, "The Convention shall never possess a single attribute of power or authority over any Church or Association. It absolutely and forever disclaims any right of this kind—hereby avowing that cardinal principle, that every Church is sovereign and independent." They strengthened this position in the section on amendments by stating that the fourth article on local autonomy shall be "scrupulously (sic) preserved."⁷

Some churches gladly supported the state convention, and some did not. Sarepta Baptist Church (Franklin) brought up the matter of whether or not to support the convention at their business meeting in August 1837 and tabled the matter until the next month, when their minutes said, "Resolved, that we disapprove of a State convention."⁸ Nevertheless, under the format of the new convention, such opposition had less impact. Knowing

that one of the downfalls of the previous state convention had been the anti-missions movement, the framers of the constitution set up a different kind of organization that allowed them to bypass opposition.

The state convention used the “society” method for choosing voting delegates, which allowed delegates based on financial contribution, rather than the “associational” method, which allowed each church an equal number of voting delegates, with additional delegates if the church had a larger membership. The framers sought to assure the widest possible support of the convention, so they made it possible for any individual or Baptist organization who made a financial contribution to join. This included individuals, churches, associations, and other groups who gave financial support—as long as the member was a “regular Baptist, in good standing.” In fact, any person or organization donating \$100 or more was automatically on the board of directors. In 1846, the 91 delegates in attendance at the convention represented “six Associations, one Missionary society, one Sunday school, and thirty-three churches.”⁹

The framers followed the example of William Carey, the founder of the modern missions movement. When his Baptist association in England rejected Carey’s appeal to support missions, he organized the Baptist Missionary Society at Kettering in 1792. The only members of the society were those who supported its cause financially, which enabled Carey to travel to India as a missionary. Mission-minded Baptists in America adopted this method, including the Triennial Convention in 1814, the Baptist General Tract Society in 1824, and the American Baptist Home Mission Society in 1832. Baptist state conventions generally preferred the society method rather than associational structure for representation.¹⁰

Although the framers followed the society method, the convention had a nuanced difference from typical societies. Societies normally supported only one cause (for example, the Triennial Convention only did international missions, and the American Baptist Home Mission Society only did national missions), but the MBC was interested in multiple ministries, a characteristic typical among state conventions in the South. The new convention would soon lend its support to foreign missions, Bible translation, state missions, a Baptist state newspaper, and an educational institution for ministers; it would also speak out on issues such as observance of the Lord’s Day, evangelistic meetings, Sunday schools, and abstinence from alcohol.

Early mission projects in Mississippi

In its first address to the Baptist ministers of the state, the new convention gave a stirring call to be on mission: "What encouragement is imparted to us in all our exertions, and what cheering hope excited in the midst of our labors. ... Every obstacle shall give way, and mountains of difficulty shall become plains before the advancement of his Kingdom. The superstition of papalism, the darkness of heathenism, the dreams of Mahometanism, and the subtleties of scepticism (sic), shall all flee before the power and grace of the Gospel. AS TRULY AS GOD LIVES, *all the earth shall be filled with his glory*."¹¹

The MBC regularly sent a delegate to the Triennial Convention in support of Baptist foreign missions. One of the first resolutions passed by the convention was to support the new Bible translation by Baptist missionary Adoniram Judson in Burma (present-day Myanmar). A controversy had erupted earlier in 1836, when the American Bible Society, whose supporters included some denominations who did not practice immersion, refused to publish his translation because he translated the Greek *baptizo* literally into Burmese as "immerse." This brought the Triennial Convention into direct conflict with the American Bible Society, and the MBC went on record as supporting the new American and Foreign Bible Society to publish Judson's translation.¹²

The convention also focused on unreached ethnic groups within the state. While the cession treaties the United States signed with the American Indian tribes removed most American Indians from Mississippi, a number of American Indians remained. The convention found that there was general apathy among the churches in their ministry to the American Indians. They talked about evangelizing the American Indians, but there was no action.¹³

The convention frequently talked in a patronizing way about the spiritual care of the large Black population. Prior to the Civil War, the majority of Black people worshipped in churches run by White people; the few congregations that existed only for Black people were not truly independent, as they were required by law to have White oversight. In 1839, the Rev. Norvell Robertson, Sr., a pastor and an enslaver, expressed the opinion that the spiritual needs of "our colored people ... merits the special attention

of the convention.” In 1842, a prominent enslaver urged “accommodation” for them and, where advisable, “to hold separate meetings for them.” Yet for all the talk at the convention, it took little action.¹⁴

Another area of concern was the lack of churches in Mississippi towns. Many Baptist pastors, like Richard Curtis, Jr., were farmers who supported themselves financially, and most Baptist churches in Mississippi were in rural areas, not towns. Bethel Baptist Church (Wilkinson) was established four miles south of Woodville in 1800, but it was not until 1824 that a charter was given for a “Baptist Meeting House” in Woodville, and that church stopped meeting until it was restarted in 1853. New Hope Baptist Church (Adams) was established south of Natchez in 1800, but no church was started in the city of Natchez until 1817, and that church disappeared from the minutes of the Union association after 1828.¹⁵

In his address to the Baptists of Mississippi after the formation of the state convention, Ashley Vaughn said, “There are in our state many rising and interesting and important villages that are not properly supplied with the preaching of the Gospel, points that should be occupied, and from which a powerful and healthful influence might be sent out upon the surrounding country.” Vaughn himself took the lead in starting a church in Natchez. He began preaching on Sunday evenings at the Presbyterian church in Natchez, and his sermons received praise from L. A. Besanson’s *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette* in December 1836. On Sunday, February 4, 1837, “the Baptist Church of the city of Natchez” was organized at the Presbyterian church and began meeting at the city hall, with Vaughn as pastor. The minutes of the 1837 MBC reported on “the feeble church” recently established in Natchez. Vaughn did all he could to reach Natchez, including opening a “book depository” in 1836 on Main Street to distribute religious literature. However, Vaughn’s health worsened, and on December 31, 1837, he resigned as pastor. He died on March 29, 1839, at age 32, leaving behind a bereaved family and leaving the Natchez congregation without leadership once again.¹⁶

W. H. Anderson was the pastor who finally led Natchez Baptist Church (Adams) to stable growth. A graduate of Brown University, he came to the pastorate of Fellowship Baptist Church (Jefferson) in 1837 when he was around 22 years old. On July 9, 1839, he was also called to preach twice a month at Clear Creek Baptist Church, Washington (Adams), at a sala-

ry of \$600 a year. Later that year, he began supplying the Natchez Baptist Church, Natchez (Adams), thus preaching at three different churches each month. In December he led the ordination of William Whieldon, a member of Clear Creek, who was to serve the Natchez and Clear Creek churches off and on for the next two decades.¹⁷

In the 1840s, Anderson increased his duties at Natchez. In 1843, he cut his preaching at Clear Creek from twice to once a month, and his salary there was reduced accordingly. In 1844, he resigned at Fellowship, allowed Whieldon to preach once a month at Clear Creek, and he began receiving his mail at Natchez. Anderson was then free to lead worship in Natchez four Sundays a month. In 1844, the church reported 212 Black members and 26 White members. In 1846, it had grown to 380 Black members and 62 White members. Under Anderson's leadership, the Natchez Baptist Church was the largest church in the Union Baptist Association.¹⁸

The establishment of churches in Vicksburg and Jackson were of special note. In 1843, E. L. Wood was appointed missionary in the city of Vicksburg with the expectation of financial aid from the American Baptist Home Mission Society for this project, and Wood reported receiving encouragement in Vicksburg but admitted there was no "large increase in church membership." The Baptists in the city were making efforts to build a church house, and some progress was being made.¹⁹

The development of a church in the state capital had been one of the principal objectives of the convention. Rev. Lewis B. Holloway came to Jackson in 1832 from Hamburg, South Carolina, as a missionary. Holloway and his wife, along with George Work and his wife, and Obedience Smith Runnels, wife of the new governor, Hiram Runnels, began the work of organizing a church. In 1836, the *Mississippian* reported that the women would hold a fair in Jackson "for the purpose of raising the necessary funds, for the building of a Baptist Church in this place." In 1837, the state legislature provided that churches might buy lots in Square 13 North, and the Baptists eventually took the southwest corner of the square, "which was located on the corner of West and Yazoo Streets." This became the site of the First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds).²⁰

The needs of the Jackson congregation came before the convention in 1840. It was reported: "In Jackson and Natchez, our churches are still small and need the sympathies and aid of our brethren, to enable them to take

the stand which the cause of Christ demands. They are still destitute of houses of worship.” Unfortunately, the convention did not have sufficient funds to assist. In 1844, the convention sought aid from the American Baptist Home Mission Society for First Baptist Church, Jackson, but failed to obtain it. Services were held in the basement of the church in 1844, but the structure was not completed until several years later. Benjamin Whitfield and W. J. Denson represented the church at the annual meeting of the convention in 1845. The church contributed \$5 to the convention and reported a Sunday school but did not have a pastor. Later, W. H. Taylor became pastor and reported in 1846 “twelve received by experience and baptism, six by letter, and two received as candidate for baptism, and an increased interest both in the church and congregation.”²¹

At the time, Baptists did not have a system of regular financial contributions to the convention based on amounts budgeted by local churches. Instead, someone had to visit the churches in the field and ask for money. The convention’s board of directors sought to engage the services of a full-time fundraising agent, offering a salary that “shall not exceed 1,000 dollars,” with four sub-agents located around the state. They found some sub-agents but were unable to get a full-time agent until Samuel S. Lattimore took the position in 1845. Lattimore, from Bethel association, was the first recording secretary of the convention. His first year as agent, he raised \$700. Much of the money agents raised had to go to the agent; it was also challenging work due to the constant travel required at a time when travel was difficult. Lattimore gave up the work as general agent to return to the pastorate, so the general board hired S. W. Sexton, who successfully raised funds, but his health failed, and he was forced to give up the work.²²

Other state ministries hit by the Panic of 1837

When one considers that the MBC began at the time of one of the worst economic depressions in the history of the United States, it is amazing that the ministries survived. The Panic of 1837 was a severe economic depression that brought great distress to the frontier community of Mississippi. Many of the business firms and planters failed, and banks were forced to close their doors. “G.T.T.” (Gone to Texas) was the common notation on

legal documents the courts sought to enforce as bankrupt citizens gave up hope and migrated west. The depression lasted into the 1840s. The Panic of 1837 hurt Baptist fundraising, but the two in-state ministries that struggled the most were the state Baptist newspaper and the attempts to start a Baptist college to train men to the ministry.²³

A newspaper was an important medium through which the convention publicized its work. Ashley Vaughn published the *Southwestern Religious Luminary* to call attention to the need for a convention, and immediately after organizing, the convention agreed to adopt the paper as its official newspaper, with Vaughn continuing as editor. They voted to “indemnify him for any expense incurred in the publication of the *Luminary*, from its commencement till the present time.” Thus, the *Southwestern Religious Luminary* became the first Baptist newspaper published in Mississippi.²⁴

Unfortunately, the *Southwestern Religious Luminary* was published “at a time when the whole country is groaning under pecuniary embarrassments.” The Panic of 1837 forced the paper to combine with the Mobile, Alabama, *Monitor* in 1838, but the *Monitor* also met financial difficulties, even after the proprietor moved its headquarters to Columbus, Mississippi. The convention suggested that the *Monitor* “effect a union of the *Christian Index* [the Georgia Baptist newspaper] with his own paper ... that should be worthy of the great South-West.” Unfortunately, all these efforts failed, but in 1845, there was revived interest in a state newspaper, and the following year the convention endorsed the *Mississippi Baptist* for “the patronage and support of every member of the denomination.”²⁵

Advocates of the state convention had argued that one of its chief responsibilities would be the promotion of Christian education. At the first annual meeting in 1837, a committee was appointed to study this subject, consisting of F. F. Sieg, L. B. Holloway, and Benjamin Whitfield. The resulting school, Judson Institute, named after the Baptist missionary Adoniram Judson, quickly raised “between six and seven thousand dollars” and secured 150 donors who pledged a total of \$35,000. A tract of more than 600 acres of land had been purchased to prepare for “the education of pious young men for the ministry.”²⁶

Despite the enthusiastic beginning, the economic hardships of the Panic of 1837 forced the Judson Institute to close and seek reorganization. Samuel S. Lattimore, the former fundraising agent of the state convention,

had started Middleton Literary and Theological Institute in Middleton in the spring of 1839. (Middleton was once a thriving city, located near present-day Winona in Montgomery County, but it ceased to exist after it was bypassed by the railroad.) In 1840, the two schools agreed to merge, adopting the name Judson Institute. In 1841, the education committee reported that the Judson Institute had buildings and professors; however, “the means for paying the salaries of Professors, and purchasing a library and philosophical apparatus are now wanting.” As the college struggled to get off the ground, the tone of the reports from the education committee became increasingly bitter. In 1842, they reported that “the relationship between the Institute and the denomination, is that of an uninteresting daughter, and a selfish, penurious step-mother.” Goaded to action, the convention approved a plan of raising \$100,000 with donors paying 6% interest on their pledges. However, Mississippi Baptists became divided over the location of the school when the town of Canton in Madison County offered an attractive site and invited the college to relocate there. What’s more, legal approval for denominational control over the college had not yet been granted by the state legislature. Deflated by these divisions and struggles, in 1845 the board reported it “had not yet been able to do anything effectually in the cause of education.” The education committee decided to postpone support for a Baptist college in Mississippi for the time being by recommending “that the board of the convention apply any funds collected for this purpose ... to the education of young men as shall be approved by the churches, at Georgetown College, Kentucky; Howard College, Alabama; Mercer University, Georgia; Western Theological Institute, Covington, Kentucky; or such seminary of learning as shall be contiguous to the residence of the candidates.”²⁷

Religious and social issues of concern to the state convention

In addition to missions and ministries, the state convention was a powerful voice on religious and social issues such as the promotion of Sunday schools and “protracted meetings,” abstinence from alcohol, observance of the Lord’s Day, and a White man’s defense of slavery.

The Sunday school movement began with the work of Robert Raikes in

England in 1781 and soon spread to America. The Second Great Awakening stimulated support for Sunday schools in local churches, and in 1824 the American Sunday School Union was organized to publish materials. Sunday schools were a relatively new concept among Mississippi Baptists at the time, but the convention supported them in local churches. The first report on Sunday schools was made to the MBC in 1839, stating, "A general attention [to Sunday schools] is beginning to awake, which we deem truly encouraging." The report noted that some people felt that teaching the Bible was a duty that belonged solely to parents and guardians, "but we think the system of Sabbath School instruction admirably calculated to render them the very aid they need." Although Sunday schools were increasing in popularity, difficulties remained. The report said, "Few comparatively are experienced in its operations; it is difficult to obtain books, and in many parts the population is so sparse as seemingly to forbid its successful operation." To overcome the lack of material, it was suggested a state depository for literature be established. The convention urged ministers to regard the Sunday school as second in importance only to the preaching of the gospel and to support it enthusiastically. To overcome the sparse population, the convention recommended that churches "cooperate with other denominations to establish union schools when necessary."²⁸

"Protracted meetings" were regarded as effective in winning souls to Christ, and they were encouraged by the convention. This was one of the "new measures"—innovations in evangelism promoted by the Presbyterian Charles G. Finney and adopted by evangelical Christians across America. Inspired by the fervent camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening, Finney encouraged churches to organize a community-wide revival campaign that met each night for several weeks of gospel preaching. Because they met for an extended time, they were called protracted meetings. Winthrop Hudson says, "In a real sense, the protracted meeting was the camp meeting brought to town." Clear Creek Baptist Church, Washington (Adams), held a protracted meeting as early as 1837, but of special interest is the report in the Clear Creek minutes on a protracted meeting held in August 1845. The church clerk's written notes are filled with poor spelling, poor grammar, and no punctuation, but exude enthusiasm: "The protracted meeting commenced according to appointment was carried on very great Excitement lasted twelve days five was Received and Baptised

congregations very large very interesting meeting this meeting was carried on by the Rev. Zachariah Reaves young and zeal and when they went way Rev. W.H. Anderson carry on the meeting.” Zachariah Reeves, the evangelist mentioned by the clerk at Clear Creek, was a popular preacher in south Mississippi who started numerous churches and baptized 3,000 to 4,000 people. Ebenezer Baptist Church (Amite) also held a protracted meeting November 19–23, 1836, that reported the names of 32 people “received by experience” and two others “restored to fellowship.”²⁹

The temperance movement began its growth in the 1820s and 1830s. It had always been common to discipline members for drunkenness, but as the temperance movement grew in America, Mississippi Baptists moved gradually from a policy of tolerating mild use of alcohol toward a policy of complete abstinence. A Committee on Temperance made an enthusiastic report in 1838 of “the steady progress of the Temperance Reformation in different parts of Mississippi and Louisiana; prejudices and opposition are fast melting away.” In 1839, D. B. Crawford gave a report to the convention on temperance which stated, “That notwithstanding, a few years since, the greater portion of our beloved and fast growing state, was under the influence of the habitual use of that liquid fire, which in its nature is so well calculated to ruin the fortunes, the lives and the souls of men, and spread devastation and ruin over the whole of our land; yet we rejoice to learn, that the cause of temperance is steadily advancing in the different parts of our State. ... We do therefore most earnestly and affectionately recommend to the members of our churches ... to carry on and advance the great cause of temperance: 1. By abstaining entirely from the habitual use of all intoxicating liquors. 2. By using all the influence they may have, to unite others in this good work of advancing the noble enterprise contemplated by the friends of temperance.” Local churches consistently disciplined members for drunkenness, but they were slower to oppose the sale or use of alcohol. For example, in May of 1844 “a query was proposed” at Providence Baptist Church (Forrest) on the issue of distributing alcohol. After discussion, the church took a vote on its opposition to “members of this church retailing or trafficking in Spirituous Liquors.” In the church Minutes, the clerk wrote that the motion “unanimously carried in opposition” but then crossed out the word “unanimously.” In January 1845, Providence voted that “the voice of the church be taken to reconsider” the matter of liquor. The motion

passed, but they tabled the issue, and it did not come back up. In March of that year, a member acknowledged his “excessive use of arden[t] spirits” and his acknowledgment was accepted; he was “exonerated.”³⁰

The convention was also concerned about people who violated the commandment to rest on the Lord’s Day. At the time, there was an ongoing controversy over the delivery of mail on Sunday by the U.S. Postal Service. In 1828, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Baptists organized the General Union for Promoting the Observance of the Christian Sabbath, and this organization and others began to actively petition Congress to overturn the law that required delivery of the mail on Sunday, but they were unsuccessful.³¹ While the MBC did not refer specifically to the Sunday mail controversy, it did hear frequent reports on how to prevent desecrations of the Christian Sabbath. In 1840, M. W. Chrestman reported, “The Sabbath, or Lord’s Day, is an institution of Divine Origin, and is therefore of universal obligation ... On the Lord’s Day all manner of servile labor is positively prohibited, with the exception of works of necessity and mercy. ... Every necessary arrangement and sacrifice should be made; every carnal pleasure and sensual gratification should be denied. ... Resolved, That we recommend that our ministering brethren with greater zeal and diligence explain and enforce the proper observance of the Lord’s Day.” Local Mississippi Baptist churches considered violation of the Sabbath a serious matter. In March 1837, William Dossett, a member of Providence Baptist Church (Forrest) confessed to the church “that he had been hunting a deer on the Sabbath, which he had wounded on the preceding evening.” After “considerable discussion of the subject,” the church was satisfied with his explanation. In 1851, Ebenezer Baptist Church (Amite) excluded E. L. Haygood for “butchering a beef for market on the Sabbath day.”³²

Division over slavery

The most divisive issue of the time was slavery, especially after 1830. England abolished slavery in the 1830s, and the abolitionist movement became more outspoken in the Northern free states in America, while White people in the South became more defensive of slavery. In 1831, Nat Turner, a Black preacher, led a revolt of enslaved people in Virginia. The report

of at least 57 White deaths in this revolt caused a wave of fear across the South, but White Southerners would not hear of any talk of ending slavery. Politicians sought an acceptable compromise for the controversy, but they were unable to find a common ground. The same was true of religious leaders in both the North and South.³³

Many enslaved people were members of Mississippi Baptist churches. The churches were controlled by White leadership, but few Baptists were enslavers in the first decades of the 19th century, which explains how the abolitionist Carter Tarrant was allowed to preach to the Mississippi Baptist Association in 1815. However, church records indicate that over time, more White Baptists became enslavers. Hopewell Baptist Church, Abbeville (Lafayette), was organized in 1841 with 24 members, and none were listed as enslaved people for a few years, but in August 1846 Hopewell recorded “sister Milly a servant” joining the church by letter and other “servants” in the years thereafter.³⁴

As White Baptists prospered in the 1800s, it became more common for them to be slaveholders, particularly after 1830. As more White Baptists owned enslaved people, church leaders tried to find a way to balance their social acceptance of slavery with the Bible’s acceptance of all people as equal. In 1846, Bethesda Baptist Church (Hinds) reported the names of 29 White members and 16 Black members, all of whom were listed according to the name of their enslavers; half of the Black members were enslaved by their fellow church members. Benjamin Whitfield, a pastor and five times president of the state convention, was an enslaver, as was LoAmmi Granberry, a deacon at Hepzibah Baptist Church (Clarke). Hepzibah’s minutes often referred to one of his enslaved people joining the church by conversion, and, on a few occasions, an enslaved person that he recently purchased moved his letter from his former location. In November 1840, “Tess, a servant man of LoAmmi Granberry” applied for membership at Hepzibah from Silver Creek Baptist Church (Pike), so they wrote to Silver Creek for his letter. In March 1841, Hepzibah received the letter from Silver Creek for “Tess, a black man ... which letter was received and the right hand of fellowship was given to the brother.” Thus, a paradox existed in which White Mississippi Baptists accepted the dehumanizing institution of slavery, yet at the same time they accepted enslaved people as brothers and sisters in Christ.³⁵

The issue of slavery caused conflict among many denominations in the United States. In 1837, Presbyterians divided between Old School Presbyterians, favored in the South, and New School Presbyterians, favored in the North. In 1845, Methodists also split; Southerners organized the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Baptists largely avoided the slavery issue in the 1830s, but abolitionists gained strength among Northerners in the Triennial Convention during the 1840s. In 1841, the Triennial Convention met in Baltimore, Maryland, and declared that the convention had no right to interfere with slavery. The same year, the American Baptist Home Mission Society declared neutrality on the issue. Northern Baptists, however, derided the Baltimore Compromise. In April 1844, the Triennial Convention met in the North, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and resolutions were proposed against slavery, showing cracks in the neutrality of the national body, but the convention again tabled the matter.³⁶

However, the crack split open later that year. In October 1844, the American Baptist Home Mission Society declined to appoint James E. Reeves, an enslaver from Georgia, as a missionary. In December 1844, the Alabama Baptist Convention inquired as to whether the Triennial Convention would allow an enslaver to be a foreign missionary, and the board of the convention gave a reply that departed from the compromise position, stating, "If any one should offer himself as a missionary, having slaves, and should insist on retaining them as property, we could not appoint him. One thing is certain, we can never be a party to any arrangement which would imply approbation of slavery."³⁷

Realizing the inevitability of separation, the American Baptist Home Mission Society decided in April 1845 that its members should carry out their work with different organizations in the North and South. Baptists in Virginia called for a convention of Southern Baptists on May 8, 1845, and 328 delegates gathered in Augusta, Georgia, to organize the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Unlike the Triennial Convention, which only functioned as a foreign mission society, the SBC created one umbrella organization that covered foreign missions, home missions, educational ministries, and other ministries.³⁸

The MBC was caught up in the emotional reaction to these events. When the Triennial Convention began in 1814, Mississippi Baptists sent delegates; they also requested missionaries from the American Baptist

Home Mission Society. However, when the national bodies went on public record against slavery, the friendly feelings of Mississippi Baptists cooled. On June 28, 1845, the MBC met and heard a report from W. Carey Crane, chairman of the Committee on Relation with the North. With their eyes closed to the immorality of being an enslaver, the report complained that “slaveholders are made morally unequal with non-slaveholders, and on that account are rendered ineligible to appointments as missionaries or agents of the foreign and domestic mission boards ... contrary to the examples of our Saviour and his apostles and entirely subversive of the usage of the Baptist denomination from the earliest period of history, as well as prejudicial to the rights of southern Christians.” The report made no mention of enslaved people having any rights. The committee concluded that “further connexion (sic) with the national organization for foreign and domestic missions, is neither agreeable, proper nor advantageous.” They recommended two resolutions: “that this convention herewith dissolves all connexion (sic) with the triennial convention, and the American Baptist home mission society” and all funds for foreign and home missions “be forwarded to the boards of the southern Baptist convention.”³⁹

This report provoked extensive debate at the state convention. Discussion from “brethren Holcome, Micou, Campbell, Minter, and Nelson” forced the convention to postpone action until the afternoon session. The discussion continued with “brethren King, Hayward, Compeer, and Parr” participating. When the vote was finally taken, the report was approved with “only one dissenting voice.” This delegate declared that “he preferred waiting until the triennial convention met in 1847 and took action on the matter—that he was afraid of hasty legislation on so vital a subject.” However, since the vote was overwhelming, he pledged to support the break with the North. Thus, seven weeks after the SBC organized, Mississippi Baptists cast their lot with the new Southern convention.⁴⁰

Chapter 5

Antebellum Prosperity and Conflict

1846 – 1861

The 15-year Antebellum period leading up to the Civil War, 1846-61, was a time of both prosperity and conflict for Mississippi Baptists. The number of Mississippi Baptists nearly doubled during this period, from 21,854 to 41,482. The Mississippi Baptist Convention (MBC) prospered, and associations that had been reluctant to affiliate with the state convention came into the fold. When the convention met in 1860 in Natchez, it was the largest and most completely reported of any of the pre-Civil War gatherings.¹ A total of 116 people attended the convention that year, contributing \$2,342 for convention-sponsored causes, including foreign missions, domestic missions, American Indian missions, Black missions, ministerial education, and Mississippi College.²

However, a tragedy was unfolding on the national stage. A half dozen one-term American presidents came and went, unable to unify the country. During a heated debate in 1850 over whether new states should be free or practice slavery, Mississippi senator Henry Foote pulled out a pistol, cocked it, and pointed it at another senator. Although Foote did not fire his gun, the political climate was primed for war.³ There was drama in the Baptist arena, as well. In 1845, when the Triennial Convention decided they would no longer allow enslavers to be missionaries, Mississippi Baptists disaffiliated with the Triennial Convention and joined the newly

formed Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Although the bitter conflict over slavery was the main cause of the split, the SBC took the opportunity to organize a new kind of national Baptist body that dealt with multiple causes under one umbrella, just as the association did at the local level. As James B. Taylor, president of the SBC, stated, “We are desirous to see a *full* Convention.”⁴

Mississippi’s relationship with the new Southern Baptist Convention

Mississippi Baptists were actively involved in the SBC from the start. The state convention joined the SBC seven weeks after it was formed; Mississippi sent delegates in 1846 and to every convention after that. The first delegates to the SBC were: H. Dockery, who was named vice president, T. C. Blewett and William Carey Crane of Columbus, and G. Tucker of Hernando. Crane served as one of the secretaries of the SBC for five of the fifteen years prior to the Civil War. Mississippians were appointed to the boards supervising the various activities of the SBC.⁵

James B. Taylor, the corresponding secretary of the Foreign Mission Board, attended the 1846 meeting of the MBC. His preaching attracted a full house. The report on foreign missions at the state convention was given by Crane, who declared, “The book of resolves should be closed, and the book of acts should be opened. Not only should there be prayer, but generous gifts also. This is a cause, which might employ a seraph’s tongue; and, undoubtedly, fill angels’ hearts, and is the cause of a Savior’s dying love. ... To preach the glad tidings of salvation to lost men—to all men *every where* ...” Crane pointed out that China was the only field in which the new board was already operating, but that it was an immense field, “embracing almost one-half of the population of the globe.” He also said that missionaries had already been appointed to the “benighted continent of Africa,” and that other fields would be entered as soon as the funds were available.⁶

The committee report offered some practical suggestions for supporting foreign missions. They urged each Mississippi church to become a missionary body and set “aside April, in which all churches, embraced within the

limits of the convention, shall present their offering to this sacred cause.” Crane’s presentation was followed by remarks from Foreign Mission Board leader Taylor. The enthusiasm for this appeal was reflected by subscriptions totaling \$700, in addition to \$188.13 that had already been collected. The contributions of Mississippi to the Foreign Mission Board were \$1,804.25 in 1850 and \$1,529.33 in 1860.⁷

D. P. Bestor, the first corresponding secretary of the Domestic Mission Board, resigned before the end of the year, saying “I have learned by visiting many, and by an extensive correspondence, that our brethren prefer carrying on their domestic missionary operations, through their Associations and State Conventions.” For years before the organization of the SBC, Baptists in the South had criticized the American Baptist Home Mission Society for neglecting their region, and some associations and state conventions in the South began to develop their own mission programs. Then, when the SBC had a mission agency for the homeland, it found that many Southern Baptists saw no place for it. Russell Holman, who took the helm of the Domestic Mission Board in December 1845, realized that his agency had to focus on areas not already reached by associations and state conventions. His board began to focus on “desolate areas,” i.e., areas where the Baptist church was not established: among American Indians and Black people and within the city of New Orleans. Mississippi’s contributions to the Domestic Mission Board were generous during that time period. In the period from 1845 to 1859, Mississippi gave a total of \$19,895.26 for missions in their homeland. This generosity for domestic missions seemed to be greater when an active fundraising agent of the board was working in Mississippi. A local example of this generosity was Hephzibah Baptist Church (Clarke), which raised an annual “subscription” of \$40 in September 1854 to support home missions, a substantial sum for a small rural church in that period. Some members opposed giving to missions, however. In 1851, M. Z. Collins publicly resigned from Bethesda Baptist Church (Hinds), saying, “I am opposed to the convention.” He complained that fundraising efforts made salvation of souls “dependent on the amount of money that can be raised.” Bethesda accepted his resignation and continued to support the state convention, electing four delegates to the convention that fall.⁸

Promotion of Sunday schools and other educational efforts

The state convention encouraged pastors to establish Sunday schools, often called Sabbath schools, in local churches with a focus was on reaching children. In 1849, the state convention recommended Sabbath schools “to instruct and imbue the young mind with great truths and principles of the Bible. They are, therefore, nurseries of moral and religious influence. It is in these places that the little wanderers are to be gathered up and instructed in that way in which they may in after life be fortified against the haunts of dissipation and ruin.” In the early years, these schools used literature published by the American Sunday School Union that was evangelical but non-denominational. Perhaps influenced by the exclusively Baptist views of the Landmark movement, the convention, in 1859, encouraged churches to make use of literature from the Southern Baptist Publication Society, rather than Union literature. Noting that other denominations had their catechisms, the state convention said, “Baptists have neglected to accomplish their high behest of giving a proper Sabbath School literature to the youth of America.” In North Mississippi, the Panola Baptist Association reported in 1848 that 15 churches in the association had Sunday schools, with an enrollment of 503 students and 18 teachers. In South Mississippi in 1853, Baptists in Woodville took up the cause of establishing Sunday schools as well. The church formed a Sunday school, recommending to other churches in the Mississippi association “the propriety [sic] of organizing and maintaining Baptist Sunday Schools and Bible classes in their churches.” However, many other church minutes make no mention of the existence of Sunday schools before the Civil War.⁹

Although it did not have a Sunday school, Bethesda Baptist Church (Hinds) established a “circulating library” for members in August 1846, just six months after the church was organized; it had a designated librarian and was active until 1859, when Bethesda closed the library and sold the books. Numerous churches in Panola association had libraries as well.¹⁰

Despite the failure of Judson Institute, Mississippi Baptists continued to focus on educational efforts for the entire state. The state convention opened a Christian bookstore, called a depository, in Vicksburg in 1844. It reported total sales of around \$1,000, which was disappointing to the convention. The depository was closed in 1848, then reopened several months

later in Jackson. The Jackson store also ran into financial trouble, so the state convention liquidated it in 1852 and paid its debts. The depository then moved to Clinton, but it closed during the Civil War.¹¹

The Baptists acquire Mississippi College

The collapse of Judson Institute had forced the state convention to divert educational funds to Baptist institutions outside of Mississippi, but it did not quench their desire for a Baptist college within the state. In 1849, the Baptist Education Society was organized at the state convention to keep this dream alive. Many of those on this board would later serve as trustees of Mississippi College.¹²

Mississippi College was founded in Clinton in 1826 as Hampstead Academy, by a group of local citizens interested in education for their children. Its founders included Hiram G. Runnels, who was to become governor of the state; Gideon Fitz, the first registrar of the land office for the Choctaw Cession; and Raymond Robinson, a successful plantation owner. Thirty students enrolled for the first term in 1827. The legislature authorized a loan with low interest, giving the school income from public “seminary land” set aside for educational support and allowing the academy to raise money through a lottery. In 1827 the legislature changed its name to Mississippi Academy, and in 1830 the name was changed again to Mississippi College, with the authority to grant “such degrees in the arts, sciences, and languages, as are usually conferred in the most respectable colleges in the United States.”¹³

Mississippi College was separated into female and male departments, each with its own faculty. The female department had a larger enrollment than the male department, and in 1831, the college became the first coeducational institution in America to grant degrees to women: Alice Robinson and Catherine Hall. The curriculum for women in 1837 included Latin, Greek, French, music, and fine art.¹⁴

Supporters of the college hoped it would be adopted by the legislature as the state university, especially since the legislature allowed it to be financed by public land monies. However, in 1840, the legislature established the University of Mississippi and began to select a location, eventually choos-

ing Oxford, which ruled out a possibility of Mississippi College becoming the state's university. At this point, the trustees looked for a religious denomination to sponsor the school. They offered the college to the Methodists, who accepted but then quickly rescinded their decision in 1841 since they had created their own school, Centenary College, in nearby Brandon Springs. The trustees then turned to the Presbyterians, who accepted, and in 1842 the Clinton Presbytery of the Mississippi Synod assumed control of the college. Presbyterians operated the institution from 1842 to 1850 with considerable success. However, the Presbyterian denomination was suffering theological and political schisms between "Old" and "New" schools divided between North and South, much like Baptists had divided. These struggles, along with competition for funds from another Presbyterian school, Oakland College, forced the trustees to offer Mississippi College to the state in 1848 as a "normal" college to educate teachers. The legislature refused, and in 1850 the Clinton Presbytery severed ties to the college, with the trustees surrendering the school to the citizens of Clinton.¹⁵

One might think that the citizens of Clinton were prosperous enough to support the college. Hinds County in 1850 was growing, with a population of over 25,000. The economy benefitted from a railroad line that had been completed between Vicksburg, Clinton, and Jackson, enabling planters in Hinds County to send their cotton to market easily. However, Clinton itself was still only a village of a few hundred people. The citizens of Clinton could not support the college by themselves, and the enrollment was not yet large enough to support the college on its own. The faculty selected for the 1850–1851 session, which included Baptist leader William Carey Crane as president, were unable or unwilling to accept the responsibility. At this point, a Methodist pastor, Thomas Ford, suggested giving Mississippi College to the Baptists, and a Baptist leader seized on the opportunity. Benjamin Whitfield, a wealthy planter and pastor in Hinds County and one of the founders of the MBC, was a new trustee of the college. If the transfer was to be made to the Baptists, quick action was needed because there was a rival proposal for the Baptists "of building up a college at Raymond," which was going to be presented to the state convention's meeting in November. A committee that included Whitfield negotiated the deal on November 1, and when the MBC met in Jackson on November 7, the committee recommended that the project at Raymond be rejected as "impracticable, because of the expense it

would involve the Convention.” The committee said, “The Trustees of the ‘*Mississippi College*,’ located at Clinton, Hinds county, offer control of the College, unincumbered by a cent of debt. ... The property is understood to be worth eleven thousand dollars. It is recommended, that *the tender be at once accepted*.” The resolution passed, and the dream of Mississippi Baptists to have a college of their own was realized.¹⁶

Baptists struggle and succeed with Mississippi College

Mississippi College’s official transition from the Clinton board of trustees to the Baptist board of trustees was made on November 30, 1850. Dr. G. G. Banks of Clinton transitioned out as board president in January 1851, and Benjamin Whitfield was chosen as president of the trustees. Three professors instructed a total of 84 students in 1851, and there was great hope for the school. However, the state convention made it clear that it would not assume any financial responsibility for the operation of the college; that burden was left in the hands of the trustees: Whitfield and his board, composed of W. H. Taylor, M. W. Phillips, Lewis W. Thompson, J. B. Stiteler, D. O. Williams, G. G. Banks, R. Cordill, and W. Jordan Denson. They boldly proposed to raise a \$100,000 endowment, yet there was an immediate need for cash to keep the school afloat, and five members of the board loaned the college \$125 each. Financial problems persisted in the early years; in 1852, the college had not paid its faculty their promised salaries, and needed repairs were neglected. At that point, board member Phillips advanced \$309.12 to pay pressing bills. The faculty was paid, as board members took on personal responsibility for the salaries. One member of the board resigned because of the demands on individual board members for support.¹⁷

The year 1852 was a turning point for Mississippi College. William M. Farrar, its fundraising agent, had great success in raising funds as he visited associational meetings. In November, the state convention meeting was held in Clinton, giving delegates an opportunity to see the college first-hand. At that convention, the trustees of Mississippi College were candid in their appeal for support, saying, “If the Baptists are in earnest [about having a college], it is time that they commence giving some evidence of



The Chapel, Mississippi College, built in 1861. The belfry was later removed. *Photo courtesy of the Mississippi College Archives.*

it.” One of the professors, E. C. Eager, gave up his position on the faculty to serve as a fundraising agent, and the next year, he reported \$60,000 had been pledged toward the college and 100 students enrolled. Thanks to the sacrifices of these early Baptist leaders, the tide had finally turned toward growth and prosperity for the college. When the convention met in 1858, board president Denson joyfully reported that \$102,800 had been pledged by 365 contributors.¹⁸

The course of study at Mississippi College was classical, as was common in that era. Students were expected to study Latin and Greek, with several courses offered in classic Roman and Greek writers such as Homer, Plato, Cicero, and Horace. Courses were offered in mathematics, science, history, philosophy, speech, and “Evidences of Christianity.” The school had 130 students in 1858, and more than 200 were enrolled in 1860. The campus was described in the 1850s as more than 18 acres on a high elevation, “covered with primitive forest oaks” and three brick buildings, two for education and one containing 12 apartments for students. The rest of the students had to board with families in Clinton. In 1860, construction of the chapel was completed. It was an imposing building, graced by Corinthian columns,

with classrooms and a large auditorium; the building still stands.¹⁹

Student misbehavior at the college was not tolerated. “If a student should be disorderly, we would bear with him as long as there might be hope of his reclamation. ... But should he pass certain bounds, unhesitatingly and promptly we would dismiss. ... Punctual attendance on all the exercises is enforced. An exact daily record is kept of the attendance, recitations and conduct of every student; also the sufficiency or insufficiency of excuses, a summary of which is sent monthly to parents.”²⁰ Soon many of these students would endure much stricter discipline in the army of the Confederacy.

Beginnings of Central Female Institute (Hillman College)

Although Mississippi College was coeducational when it began, after it came under Baptist control, some of the supporters preferred to keep the sexes separated, and MC became a male-only college. In 1853, to correct this neglect of women, Central Baptist Association opened Central Female Institute, a college for women, just up the street from Mississippi College. The association stated that their goal was to do for women what the state convention did for men and build “an institution of learning, for females, of a high grade, second to none in our land.” They located the school for women in Clinton because it was a small town free from “all fashionable amusements and its multitude of concomitant evils, which served to detract the mind of youth.” In addition, families could “educate all their children” in the same town. Mississippi College trustee Benjamin Whitfield was the chairman of the Central association committee that organized Central Female Institute, and the two schools cooperated in many ways, sometimes sharing faculty members and resources. Central Female Institute soon became a college, and in 1891 its name was changed to Hillman College in honor of Walter and Adelia Hillman, who began teaching there in 1856 and bought the college from Central association in 1866.²¹

Growing opposition to alcohol

Mississippi Baptists steadily became more vocal in their opposition to

alcohol throughout the first half of the 19th century. Church minutes reveal that the most common reason for disciplining church members was the abuse of alcohol. It was common to read entries such as this one from Hephzibah Baptist Church (Clarke) in 1853: “Brother James Watts came forward and acknowledged to the church he had a short time since drank too much spirits, and asked for forgiveness, which was granted.” On the associational level, statements were made against serving alcohol. In 1846, the Mississippi Baptist Association was still attempting to prohibit the use of alcohol at its own meetings; they passed a resolution saying, “We respectfully request the brethren and friends who may entertain this body at its future meetings, to refrain from presenting ardent spirits in their accommodations.”²²

By the 1850s, the state convention was calling not only for abstinence but for legal action as well. In 1853, the convention adopted the report of the Temperance Committee that said, “The time has arrived when the only true policy for the advocates of Temperance to pursue, is . . . to secure the enactment by the Legislature of a law, utterly prohibiting the sale of ardent spirits in any quantities whatsoever.” They endorsed the enactment of the Maine Liquor Law in Mississippi. In 1851, Maine had become the first state to pass a prohibition of alcohol “except for mechanical, medicinal, and manufacturing purposes,” and this law was hotly debated all over the nation, as other states considered adopting similar laws. In 1854, the Mississippi legislature banned the sale of liquors “in any quantity whatever, within five miles of said college,” referring to Mississippi College. In 1855, Ebenezer Baptist Church (Amite) granted permission to the “sons of temperance” to build a “temperance hall” on land belonging to the church. In 1860, a member of Bethesda Baptist Church (Hinds) confessed he “had been selling ardent spirits by the gallon” and “acknowledged he had done wrong and would do so no more.” He was “requested by the church not to treat his friends with spiritous [sic] liquors when visiting his house.”²³

Ministry to Black people and American Indians

The ministry to Black people was one of the biggest challenges for White Baptists in the South. Antebellum White Mississippi Baptist lead-

ers tried to balance their racist cultural acceptance of slavery with their Biblical call to share the gospel with all people, and they were blind to the contradiction. On one hand, they seemed to fear that efforts to evangelize enslaved people and teach them the scriptures could be misconstrued by other White people as support for the abolition of slavery. On the other hand, they had a passion for sharing the gospel with the Black population, nearly all of whom were enslaved. A report at the state convention in 1842 put it this way: “It is not necessary that we should destroy or even attempt to destroy, the vital bond that now exists, that distinguishes one portion of the community from the other—but it is right that all human beings should be recognized as rational and accountable creatures, and that all be taught to fear and serve God.”²⁴

Although Black people and White people worshiped together in most of their churches, White Mississippi Baptist leaders were also conflicted about whether that was the best policy. The report at the state convention in 1842 reflected a racist and condescending attitude toward the intelligence of Black people: “The best and most efficient mode of preaching the gospel to that portion of our population, is to preach to them in unmixed congregations. . . . Some of our more wealthy brethren are employing ministers to preach upon their plantations to their servants. Most of our church buildings are so constructed, that the blacks can hear upon the same floor with the white people or in the galleries. It is our opinion that a sermon prepared and designed for a white congregation, will be as a general thing, of little value to the blacks. Their minds are not cultivated, and they are not capable of following a close argument designed for mature intellects. Sermons should be delivered to them in separate congregations in the church, or on the plantation.” However, a report at the state convention in 1861 declared that “as the Master preached the gospel to the poor, let us imitate his example in this respect” by sharing the gospel with those who were enslaved. The report urged slaveholders to read scripture and pray with enslaved people, but it also laid the responsibility on the local church to reach Black people on their church field: “It is the duty of each church to have the gospel preached to this class in their respective bounds.”²⁵

Mississippi’s harsh laws about enslaved people also hampered the ministry to Black people. In 1857, Mississippi code made illegal any assembly of more than five “slaves, or free Negroes, or mulattos . . . at any place of

public resort, or at any meeting house or houses in the night, or at any school for the purpose of teaching them reading and writing.” Violation of this law could result in a punishment of “not more than 39 lashes on the bare back.” An exception was made for “religious worship,” if enslaved people had written permission from “any master or employer of slaves” and the service was conducted by an ordained White minister or attended by “at least two discreet and respectable white persons, appointed for that purpose.” The code made it illegal for “free Negroes or Mulattos” to perform “the functions of a minister of the gospel.”²⁶

These restrictions meant that Black Baptists in Mississippi could not gather legally for worship unless White people provided pastors, so White ministers usually preached to Black people in local churches. Some of the Baptist churches of Mississippi had more Black members than they had White members. In 1846, Clear Creek Baptist Church, Washington (Adams), had 15 White members and 139 Black members; Grand Gulf Baptist Church (Claiborne), had 8 White members and 105 Black members; and Columbus Baptist Church, Columbus (Lowndes), in 1845 had 399 members, 80% of whom were Black. About one-third of the members of the Columbus Baptist Association were Black, and most of Central Baptist Association’s members were Black, some 2,000 strong. Despite this, the legal restrictions on enslaved people and their isolation on plantations by owners who had no interest in their spiritual condition meant that many thousands did not hear a Christian sermon. Enslaved Black people often practiced forms of African religious traditions blended with American Indian rituals to cope with disease and death. In 1859, a missionary to Black people in the swamps of the Mississippi Delta reported that many “scarcely ever hear preaching—some never.” To illustrate this, he told of “an old woman whose owner furnished her with a mule to ride several miles to attend my meeting. On her way she remarked to an overseer that she hoped the Lord would let her hear a white man preach once more, for she had not heard one in thirty years. She was a Baptist when she came into the swamp.”²⁷

White Baptists were also interested in converting Mississippi’s American Indian tribes to Christianity, but they were conflicted about the best way to share the gospel with them. At first, Southern Baptists sought to reach them through the Indian Mission Society. In 1855, the Indian Mission Society merged with the Domestic Mission Board, and the name was changed to the

Domestic and Indian Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Allen Humphries from Hopewell Baptist Church, Abbeville (Lafayette), was elected to this board in 1857; they spent relatively large sums of money trying to convert American Indians. The efforts of the board frequently ran counter to the wishes of White citizens who were seeking American Indian lands. In Mississippi, the Chickasaws and Choctaws had occupied large areas of land until the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830, in which the Choctaws gave up most of the land in east-central and northwest Mississippi, and the Treaty of Pontotoc in 1832, in which the Chickasaws gave up the remaining land of northeast Mississippi. The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit provided for the removal of most Choctaws to territories in what is now western Arkansas and southern Oklahoma. Baptist missionary Isaac McCoy envisioned a “Choctaw Canaan” and went west with them to Oklahoma. The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek also allowed a portion of the Choctaw tribe to remain on limited lands in Mississippi. In 1834, the American Baptist Home Mission Society sent Jeremiah Burns to preach among Mississippi Choctaws, but he accomplished little. The MBC adopted a resolution in 1853 that expressed a preference for segregating them on reservations and preaching to them there. The resolution stated, “Resolved, That this Convention, believing from past experience among the Indians, that the easiest and best way of reaching, civilizing and evangelizing them, is to bring them as near as practicable together in some specified Territory. Therefore this Body do most respectfully suggest to the Indian Mission Board the propriety of using every effort in their power to urge the government of the United States to ... concentrate tribes and remnant of tribes as fast as practicable upon said Territories.” The use of the words “civilizing and evangelizing” together showed how White Mississippi Baptists in the Antebellum period confused the gospel with their own culture. They expected American Indians to find freedom from sin when they weren’t giving them freedom to leave the reservation. It is not surprising that Baptists made no major progress among the Choctaw tribe in Mississippi until after the Civil War.²⁸

The Landmark controversy

After splitting from the North in the 1840s, Southern Baptists disputed

with one another in the 1850s over a controversy that came to be called Landmarkism. Baptist historian Leon McBeth says, “It would be impossible to understand Southern Baptists apart from Landmarkism.” Landmarkism was a movement begun by James R. Graves that emphasized that the local church was the only church (denying the idea of the universal church), and that the Baptist church was the only legitimate local church. Baptists already tended to be exclusive in their attitudes toward other denominations, but Graves took this attitude to the next level. In 1845, a few years before Graves began publishing his ideas, Hephzibah Baptist Church (Clarke), excluded a woman for joining the Methodist church. Graves took this exclusive attitude further; whereas Hephzibah still referred to the Methodists as a “church,” Graves would only call them a “society,” having no legitimate standing in the kingdom of God.²⁹

J. R. Graves was a schoolteacher and preacher who reacted vehemently against Alexander Campbell, the leader of the Disciples of Christ movement that had divided many Baptist churches in the 1830s. Graves came to Nashville, Tennessee, in 1845, and joined First Baptist Church, Nashville, where the popular R. B. C. Howell was pastor. Howell recognized Graves’s talents and asked him to help publish his newspaper, *The Tennessee Baptist*. Because state Baptist newspapers struggled to survive in Mississippi, many Mississippians read *The Tennessee Baptist*. In 1850, Howell left Nashville to pastor a church in Richmond, Virginia, and he turned over the newspaper to the charismatic Graves, who had the platform he wanted. In 1854, Graves published a pamphlet by J. M. Pendleton, *An Old Landmark Re-set*, which gave the name to the movement based on the warning in Proverbs 22:28 not to move an ancient landmark. This book advanced the ideas of “closed communion” (that communion should only be given to fellow members of the local Baptist church), “alien immersion” (that the only immersion that can be recognized is that done in a Baptist church), and “Baptist successionism” (that people who believe as Baptists believe have always existed since the first century).³⁰

Landmarkism had great influence in Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi, but Southern Baptists on the East Coast tended to see it as too extreme. Howell, once Graves’s mentor, became his chief critic, and this argument was sometimes referred to as the Graves-Howell controversy. This reached a climax in 1859, when Graves went to the SBC in Richmond, de-

terminated to have the Foreign Mission Board abolished, believing missionaries should only be sent by the local church. Graves was soundly defeated, but, not surrendering, he opposed the reelection of Howell as president of the SBC. His efforts forced two ballots before Howell was elected by a plurality. Seeking peace, Howell declined the election in favor of Richard Fuller.³¹

Even before Graves's ideas became well-known, Mississippi Baptist churches were not tolerant of members attending churches of other denominations. In 1849, Hopewell Baptist Church, Abbeville (Lafayette), recorded that "Jane Arnold ... confessed that she joined the Methodists and had no disposition to retract," so they removed her from membership. Likewise, in 1850, First Baptist Church, Louisville (Winston), excluded a member for simply attending a Methodist church. However, Mississippi Baptists had been willing to share pulpits with other denominations on special occasions. When the MBC met in Jackson in 1850, the Presbyterian and Methodist churches opened the doors of their churches for Baptist convention leaders to preach, and the Baptists thanked them for their hospitality. Yet as the 1850s progressed, Landmarkism had great influence in Mississippi. In 1855, the Mississippi Association "heartily endorsed" Pendleton's *An Old Landmark Re-set*. Mississippian A. C. Dayton was a Presbyterian layman who converted to the Baptist faith in 1852. Dayton published a novel, *Theodosia Ernest, Or Heroine of Faith*; written in the style of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, it tells the story of a Presbyterian girl and her friends who conclude that Baptists are the only true church. Graves himself attended the MBC in 1852 to promote *The Tennessee Baptist*.³²

In north Mississippi, the influence of Landmarkism nearly led to a split in the state convention. Graves's newspaper, *The Tennessee Baptist*, enjoyed a wide circulation in northern Mississippi and siphoned off potential subscribers to *The Mississippi Baptist*, which had failed in 1849 but was restarted by the state convention in 1857. J. T. Freeman, editor of *The Mississippi Baptist*, spoke out against the efforts of William Carey Crane in north Mississippi. Crane had established Semple-Broadus College in Center Hill in De Soto County, which he hoped would rival Mississippi College. Crane had an opportunity to be president of Mississippi College in 1850 when it was taken over by the state convention, but he had not taken the position. Crane and Graves were in close allegiance. This was apparent as early as

1855, when Crane was president of the state convention and the circular letter promoted Landmark views. The circular read, "Baptist churches are the only Gospel churches in Christendom." This circular repeated the Landmark version of Baptist history, claiming the first Baptist church was organized in the upper room in Jerusalem. Ironically, despite these views, Crane preached at a Methodist church when churches of other denominations provided use of their buildings for Baptist preachers during the 1857 state convention in Lexington. Crane went so far as to organize a rival state convention at Oxford in November 1859, called the General Association of Baptists in North Mississippi. Instead of representation based on financial contributions, it based representation on the local church, an approach favored by Landmark Baptists. Delegates were chosen from member churches and associations at a ratio of one delegate for every 100 members.³³

The Landmark controversy dominated the 1860 meeting of the MBC in Natchez. Resolutions on the subject were introduced, and, recognizing deep feelings on the subject, the issue was referred to the Committee on Resolutions, chaired by Isham Harrison, Jr. The committee reported a revised resolution to the convention, which was approved. The resolution began by stating agreement with Landmarkists that a church is a congregation of immersed believers and autonomous in governing itself. However, it stated that "the issue presented and known as 'An Old-Landmark Reset' is not a just or sufficient cause of denominational or personal contentions ... but is one of those questions about which differences of opinion and practice ought to have the broadest Christian toleration." The state convention came down on the side of those opposed to Landmarkism by defending the use of mission boards and agencies: "Resolved, That the Baptist denomination of this State are emphatically a missionary people; and ... we are not prepared to abandon those organizations which the wisdom of the experience of the denomination have adopted for that purpose, but will, as heretofore, heartily co-operate with them." The resolution also affirmed the publication and use of Baptist "Sabbath School Literature," which some Landmarkists attacked since it came from a board rather than a local church. Concerned "that these controversies, if they have not already, will ... degenerate into a personal character mainly," they asked the state convention president to appoint a committee of ten men as "to offer their mediation" and seek to reconcile the parties involved.³⁴

The MBC named people on both sides of the controversy to the mediation committee, including J. T. Freeman of Jackson and Moses Granberry of Grenada, who was treasurer of the north Mississippi splinter group. This "Peace Committee" gave a report at the 1861 state convention, but "after remarks from a number of brethren, the Convention refused to adopt the report." Nevertheless, Mississippi Baptists were able to avoid a split over Landmarkism, as Crane, its most influential leader, moved to Texas, and the outbreak of the Civil War turned their attention to more urgent issues of survival. However, the influence of Landmark ideas would continue to linger in Mississippi.³⁵

Chapter 6

Antebellum Mississippi Baptist Church Life

1846 – 1861

During the Antebellum period, Mississippi was one of the fastest-growing states in the Union. In the two decades from 1840 to 1860, the population of Mississippi increased from 375,651 to 791,305. Cotton production and, by 1861, the establishment of 860 miles of railroad lines across the state helped make Mississippi one of the richest states as well. Wealthy enslavers on large cotton plantations lived like princes in stately mansions, frequently receiving dignitaries from around the country and exercising vast political power. Yet most Mississippians lived humble lives on family farms. A large number of Baptist churches thrived.¹

Churches in the cities and towns

Although Mississippi had grown to a population of nearly 800,000 by the Civil War, the vast majority lived in rural areas. Like Mississippi's citizens, its Baptist churches were more often in rural settlements than towns, and few were on the Gulf Coast. Pearl River Baptist Association only had one church in a coastal county, Red Creek Baptist Church (Harrison); Red Creek was a rural area inland from the coast. By 1860, though, several towns in Mississippi had over 1,000 residents: Natchez was the largest, with

6,619 residents, followed by Vicksburg with 4,591, Columbus with 3,308, Jackson with 3,199, Holly Springs with 2,987, and Port Gibson with 1,453. Clinton, home of Mississippi College, had 289 citizens.²

Although the Columbus Baptist Church, Columbus (Lowndes), was thriving, the Mississippi Baptist Convention (MBC) recognized the need to plant churches in many of the other emerging cities and towns. In 1848, the convention gave \$100 each to pastors in Yazoo City, Jackson, Vicksburg, and Grenada. That year, S. I. Caldwell, pastor of First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), reported that the house of worship had been completed and membership had increased by 15 White members and 11 Black members. In 1853, I. T. Hinton, in the report of the Southern Baptist Domestic Mission Board, pointed out the need for placing missionaries in the state capital and the chief commercial towns, including Jackson, Vicksburg, Natchez, Biloxi, and the Gulf Coast, all of which received aid. The Domestic Mission Board reported that the minister of the “church in Jackson, the capital received a commission from this Board. A large revival of religion has added very greatly to the strength of the church, however, rendering our aid unnecessary.”³

Natchez Baptist Church, Natchez (Adams), was restarted by Ashley Vaughn in 1837 and began to prosper under the pastorate of W. H. Anderson in the 1840s, but they were never able to build a meeting place of their own. They met at a Presbyterian church, at the courthouse, and at the Natchez Institute. In 1848, they called Rev. T. G. Freeman as pastor, but the church underwent a bitter split in 1849, and Freeman led in the formation of a new Baptist congregation, Wall Street Baptist, Natchez (Adams), in April 1850. The new congregation moved rapidly to build a sanctuary, breaking ground a month later at the corner of Wall Street and State Street across from the Adams County Courthouse. They reported to the 1852 meeting of the Central Baptist Association that they had “erected a house of worship at a cost of \$7,000 and paid for—the first ever owned by the Baptists in this city.” That year, Wall Street had 41 White members and three Black members, while Natchez Baptist Church had 34 White members and 412 Black members. Three years later, Wall Street had grown to 131 White and 105 Black members and held services four Sundays a month. Wall Street continued to grow and proudly hosted the 1860 MBC, whereas Natchez Baptist Church dissolved in 1857; its Black members were

absorbed into Rose Hill Baptist Church, Natchez (Adams), an independent Black congregation that met on Madison Street.⁴

By 1859, several town churches reported strong membership numbers to the state convention, including First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), with 309 members; Canton Baptist Church, Canton (Madison), with 197 members; and Vicksburg Baptist Church, Vicksburg (Warren), with 160 members. An indirect result of the Baptists taking control of Mississippi College in 1850 was that a Baptist church was developed in Clinton. In the nine years afterward, Clinton Baptist Church, Clinton (Hinds), became the second-largest of the five churches in the town. In May 1860, W. Jordan Denson described the church this way: "At present the Baptist Church of Clinton is enjoying one of those powerful revivals of religion, that she has so frequently been blessed with since the location of the college in that village. Last Sunday twenty-two were baptized, a large part students. Others will be baptized in two weeks—many others, we have reason to hope."⁵

Although outside of the state, New Orleans was of special interest to Mississippi Baptists. The earliest Baptist churches in Louisiana were started by ministers from Mississippi, and those churches were affiliated with associations in Mississippi. New Orleans was an international port and was important to the entire Mississippi River Valley. In 1843, First Baptist Church, New Orleans, was organized with 10 members. It had great difficulty maintaining itself until Isaac T. Hinton became pastor. Under his leadership, the church made remarkable progress, increasing its membership from 27 to 122 members. A yellow fever epidemic in 1847 took the life of the pastor and many members, after which the church declined rapidly, and in 1851 the congregation lost its building to its creditors. The MBC was distressed at this news and adopted resolutions urging the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) to help raise funds for a new church building in New Orleans. Several members of the convention made donations or pledges for this project. Finally, in 1861, First Baptist Church, New Orleans, had another sanctuary.⁶

Demographics of the local church

The typical Mississippi Baptist congregation was a rural church with a

small membership that often fluctuated with the changes in frontier settlement. For example, Providence Baptist Church (Forrest) was founded in a rural area of what later became Forrest County in 1818, some 70 years before the town of Hattiesburg existed. The church grew to 56 members, but the migrations from southern Mississippi to northern Mississippi following the American Indian land cessions in the 1830s reduced the membership to 15 by 1841. However, the church grew again, reaching 71 by the beginning of the Civil War. Bethesda Baptist Church (Hinds) was organized in February 1846 with 32 members, including eight “servants” listed as belonging to three members of the congregation. Bethesda bought their land from church members Isaac and Mary Riser for \$10, where “recently had been erected a Baptist meeting house.” The church grew quickly, and seven months after it started, Bethesda reported 39 White members and 16 Black members. Hinds County cotton plantations and farms prospered with access to a railroad to transport their products to the port of Vicksburg. Bethesda continued to grow steadily, enlarging their meeting house to accommodate the increasing number of Black members and adding a graveyard. Isaac Riser faithfully served as custodian of the building and treasurer of the church throughout the Antebellum years. By 1860, the congregation had grown to 73 White members and 70 Black members, described as “servants” and listed only by first names.⁷

The 1860 minutes of Pearl River Baptist Association in southeast Mississippi give us a snapshot of the diversity of Mississippi Baptist churches at the time. Of the 28 churches in Pearl River Association, the average church had 67 members, and only four churches had more than 100 members. The largest church was Silver Creek Baptist Church (Pike), with 221 members, and the smallest was Friendship Baptist Church (Lawrence), with nine members. Every church in the association had Black members who worshiped along with White members. Unlike western Mississippi where cotton plantations reigned, and churches often had more Black members than White members, Pearl River association reported that 80% of the members were White, and 20% were Black. However, this varied greatly, even within the same county. Although they were both in Marion County, Graves Creek Baptist Church had 31 White members and just one Black member, while Antioch Baptist Church had 31 White members and 33 Black members. Occasionally, special worship services for Black members were held

at separate locations. In 1856 Sarepta Baptist Church (Franklin) decided to let a church member serve the Lord's Supper "to the colored members of Sarepta Church at the house of Brother Benjamin Herrings." These were enslaved people of Benjamin Herrings, a church "brother."⁸

Pastors and deacons

Both pastors and deacons were ordained by a presbytery of ordained men who examined them, prayed over them, and laid hands of blessing on them. In the Antebellum period, the pastor of a Mississippi Baptist church usually received an "annual call." That is, not only did they vote to call a pastor when he first became pastor, but late in the year, usually in November or December, the church would officially vote to ask their pastor to "supply the pulpit" for another year, and the pastor would decide whether to accept this call. It was usually approved for another year as a mere formality, but sometimes the church would debate it, and sometimes the pastor himself would decide not to renew his commitment for the next year. In 1860, Bethesda Baptist Church (Hinds) changed from an annual call to an indefinite call for their long-time pastor, Jesse Woodall, as long as both parties were agreeable, and they started requiring him to preach twice a month instead of once.⁹

Mississippi Baptist churches were slow to accept the idea of financial support of their pastors. As early as 1824, the circular letter of the Mississippi Baptist Association had encouraged churches to pay their pastors a salary, arguing that "when the minister of the Word is compelled to abandon the holy calling six days in the week for the sustenance of the body, and to procure himself the means of traveling and preaching on the seventh, the church must be neglected, and languish in consequence." However, most Baptist churches in rural areas had an unpaid pastor who supported himself, usually by farming, just as Richard Curtis, Jr., did. There were more churches than pastors, and many pastors preached at several different churches, usually only once a month at each church. In April 1850, Clear Creek Baptist Church, Washington (Adams), recorded, "No regular preaching this year on account of no pastor to supply us." Clear Creek solved the problem by getting the Natchez congregation to share their pas-

tor. In December 1857, Sarepta Baptist Church (Franklin) called one of its own deacons, William East, as pastor, a role he continued for several years. Many of the Mississippi Baptist church minutes make no reference to paying their pastor any salary. Bethesda listed all of their contributions and expenditures at the end of each year. In 1851, Bethesda received \$13.17 and spent \$20.17. The pastor was not paid a penny. This practice meant that pastors were readily accepted by their neighbors as one of them, and congregations could not use money to control their pastor. This system worked well in rural areas but was not so effective in towns, where pastors had difficulty finding other means of support. Clear Creek, just outside Natchez, reported paying their pastor \$300 a year in 1847. Columbus Baptist Church, Columbus (Lowndes), most likely the wealthiest Baptist church in Mississippi, paid their pastor \$1,500 a year until, in 1858, they increased it to \$2,500 per year and provided a pastor's home to entice Thomas C. Teasdale to become their pastor.¹⁰

The practice of paying the pastor became more common in rural churches late in the Antebellum period. In 1859, Bethesda elected an "assessing committee" that encouraged members to give regularly, and that year they collected \$288.90 in contributions, a dramatic increase from the typical \$20 or so a year they had been receiving in collections. Then, in January 1860, they voted to pay their pastor of many years, Jesse Woodall, \$300 a year.¹¹

Another solution to having unpaid pastors was for an association to pay for missionaries to travel all over the association's territory, doing the work of evangelism and church planting. In 1848, Panola association paid \$232.74 to John Middleton, its missionary, to work among the churches in north Mississippi. In 1860, Pearl River association paid two missionaries: William Fortinberry, who worked on the east side of the Pearl River, and Calvin Magee, who worked on the west side. Fortinberry worked 138 days, preached 124 sermons, traveled 2,171 miles, and recorded 12 baptisms. Magee worked 50 days, preached 50 sermons, traveled 612 miles, and recorded 11 baptisms. For their efforts, the association paid Fortinberry \$276 and Magee \$100. From this, we may deduce that the typical pay was about \$2 per day.¹²

After the office of pastor, the deacon was next in importance. Providence Baptist Church (Forrest) adopted a statement of the duties of a deacon in

1844. Citing 1 Timothy 3:8-15 and “the general inference of Scriptures,” the church said that deacons should visit and relieve the poor, visit and pray for the sick and bereaved, “stop any evil report” about the church or member, help settle differences between members, “attend to the Ministry” by supporting the preaching of the gospel, “prepare the elements [of the Lord’s Supper] and distribute them,” and “assist in other ordinances when called on.” A presbytery of ordained men would meet to examine and ordain a new deacon, who often served for life. In 1846, one of the deacons of Sarepta asked “to be released from the duty on account of his advanced age.” The issue was considered for a month, and they released him. Occasionally a church would decide it needed additional deacons, especially to care for a growing membership. For instance, Bethesda decided to add two deacons after a growth spurt in 1853, so they set a date for election, elected, and ordained them.¹³

Worship in the local church

Sunday services were commonly referred to as “divine worship,” “divine service,” or simply “preaching.” Many Mississippi Baptist churches in this time only had a “preaching” service once a month, as their pastor often had to preach at other churches on the other Sundays of the month, and sometimes they had to adjust their schedule to that of the pastor and his other churches. For instance, in 1855, after calling a new pastor, Hephzibah Baptist Church (Clarke) voted to move their monthly worship “from the second to the fourth Sabbath.” Likewise, in 1853, after Bethesda Baptist Church (Hinds) called a new pastor, they changed their monthly meeting for the first Sunday to the third Sunday, and “we grant him the privilege to preach for us one Sabbath each month.”¹⁴

Baptism was generally done in a natural body of water near the church building. Hopewell Baptist Church, Abbeville (Lafayette), recorded in their minutes in July 1857 that after their business conference, they “adjourned and repared [sic] to the water to attend to the Ordinance of Baptism and Sister Sarah Couch was Baptized.” Bethesda constructed an outdoor baptismal pool at a natural spring not far from their meeting house and built a “dressing house at the pool” that was 10 feet by 12 feet. A member also

furnished a “suit of clothes” to wear for baptisms. Baptism was for believers only and by immersion; the Landmark movement influenced Baptists to reject “alien immersion” by non-Baptists. In 1853, “Phebe, a servant of Francis Martin” wanted to join Bethesda. Phebe had been immersed as a believer by a Methodist minister. The examining committee was “satisfied with her Christian walk” and recommended that her “former baptism” be accepted, but the church rejected the recommendation at their Saturday business meeting. The next day, after the Sunday preaching service, Phebe was accepted as a candidate for baptism and the congregation “repaired to the water and Phebe was baptized.”¹⁵

The Lord’s Supper was usually distributed by deacons. Clear Creek Baptist Church, Washington (Adams), served the Lord’s Supper every three months. Sarepta Baptist Church (Franklin) also observed communion about once every three months except when something unusual caused a postponement. They used real wine during that time. Bethesda Baptist Church (Hinds) recorded expenditure of \$2 for a gallon of wine in 1851. They also considered it a duty for every member to partake of the Lord’s Supper “when not providentially hindered.” Besides the Lord’s Supper, foot washing was also commonly practiced. Sarepta’s minutes in August 1846 referred to “the duty of foot-washing” to be observed the next month in worship. Although foot washing was called a “duty,” only baptism and communion were referred to as “ordinances.”¹⁶

Music was important in Mississippi Baptist church life. In 1810, the very first entry in the Sarepta minutes in 1810 said they “opened by singing and prayer.” The Pearl River association mentions closing their meeting “united in singing a hymn.” Hephzibah ordered a “dozen hymn books (Dossey’s Choice) for the use of the church and congregation to be paid for by voluntary contributions.” The hymnal they referred to as “Dossey’s Choice” was *The Choice: in two parts*, compiled by William Dossey, published in 1833 by Charles de Silver & Sons in Philadelphia. It was called *The Choice: in two parts*, because it offered a choice of two types of songs: traditional hymns, such as “O, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing,” and songs based on the Psalms of the Bible, set to rhyme, such as one based on Psalm 46 which began, “God is our refuge in distress, a present help when dangers press ...” Bethesda voted to get a new hymnal, and ordered 24 hymnals called *Psalmody* but also “earnestly recommended that the present practice of lin-

ing the hymns be continued.” This likely means they ordered *The Baptist Psalmody: A Selection of Hymns for the Worship of God*, a 794-page hymnal published in 1850 by the Southern Baptist Publication Society, edited by Southern Baptist leader Basil Manly. The practice of “lining the hymn” meant that a song leader chanted or sang a line of the song a capella, and the congregation repeated the line.¹⁷

Mississippi Baptists were a praying people. Church minutes frequently made mention of prayer meetings and times of fasting and prayer. Ebenezer Baptist Church (Amite) met on a Monday in 1846 to “fast and pray to the Lord that he would send more faithful Laborers into his Harvest, and Call their Pastor.” In 1847, Ebenezer met on a Friday “to fast and pray for the peace and prosperity of the churches.” Throughout the 1840s, it was the practice at Hephzibah to meet for an hour of prayer before having their Sunday worship service.¹⁸

Evangelism in the local church

Churches frequently scheduled a series of evangelistic “protracted” meetings to share the gospel in their community, often calling on guest preachers. In July 1856, Bethesda Baptist Church (Hinds) stated in their minutes that they voted “on motion we protract our July meeting.” Thus, they met every day for a week, from one Sunday in July to the following Sunday. They appointed a committee of two people to work with the pastor and “invite ministerial aid to assist in our protracted meeting.” Sarepta Baptist Church (Franklin) held a protracted meeting “commencing on Saturday before the 3[rd] Lord’s day in October 1855 and ending on Tuesday after the 4[th] Lord’s day of the same.” The church minutes recorded the names of 16 people who were baptized as a result of the meeting, many of them adults. In a 14-day series of evangelistic meetings, Bethesda recorded the names of people joining the church every day from Sunday, July 17, through Sunday, July 31, 1853, for a total of 66 new members. On many of the days, they held baptisms immediately after the services. Hopewell Baptist Church, Abbeville (Lafayette), had a protracted meeting in August 1858 that lasted 12 days, resulting in six professions of faith. When the congregation met at the water for baptism, a man named D.

A. Tyler “came forward and stated what the Lord had done for him,” and the congregation agreed to baptize him as well. Ebenezer Baptist Church (Amite) had a protracted meeting that met each day from February 6 to 18, 1860, where they received 16 new members. When the invitation was given to join the church, it was commonly called “extending the right hand of fellowship.”¹⁹

Perhaps one of the most dramatic evangelistic meetings among Mississippi Baptists before the Civil War occurred in Columbus and several other towns in northeast Mississippi in 1858. It happened during the layman’s prayer revival that swept through America in 1857–1858. Often overlooked by historians because it was not associated with any famous personalities, the revival began in lay-led prayer meetings in New York City, and it spread to every small town, resulting in up to one million conversions. Thomas C. Teasdale, a Baptist pastor from Washington, D.C., made an evangelistic tour of the South and arrived in Columbus in the spring of 1858. He had an assistant, D. A. Nichols, who arrived in advance to conduct prayer meetings to prepare the people spiritually. Nichols also sang during the services. Columbus Baptist Church, Columbus (Lowndes), had been without a pastor for a year and a half, and Nichols was told that Columbus was “one of the hardest places in the world” and “in a cold state of religion.” Teasdale preached and Nichols sang for four weeks in Columbus; crowds came, and many prominent citizens made professions of faith. When the meeting ended, they counted 400 souls converted, with half of them joining Columbus Baptist Church and the rest joining other churches in town. Teasdale then preached for three weeks in Aberdeen, resulting in 150 professions of faith, including “judges and attorneys-at-law, as well as merchants and planters.” He conducted similar meetings in Starkville, Macon, and Crawfordville, and he returned to Columbus to preach a second series of meetings. Columbus Baptist Church asked Teasdale to move to Mississippi to be their pastor, which he agreed to do in October 1858.²⁰

The regular scheduling of protracted meetings and the organized, deliberate approach of evangelists like Teasdale was an indication of how Mississippi Baptists became more intentionally evangelistic by mid-century. As this happened, some churches began to moderate the Calvinist views that they held earlier in the 19th century. In 1847, Hephzibah Baptist Church (Clarke) unanimously agreed to change its doctrinal statement about pre-

destination, voting to strike out the words about “unconditional election of a definite number of the human family” and replace them with “election of all of his spiritual children.” This was a rejection of the Calvinistic doctrines of unconditional predestination and limited atonement. This trend continued for the remainder of the 19th century.²¹

Church architecture

Baptists consistently called their house of worship a meeting house, to make it clear that a church is a congregation, not a building. The oldest house of worship in Mississippi is the sanctuary of Woodville Baptist Church, Woodville (Wilkinson). Although the exact date it opened is unknown, the building was chartered by the state legislature on January 7, 1824. Made of brick, it has four white columns in the Greek Revival style, opening to a portico and supporting a triangular arch. Above the arch, the steeple has a square base, ascending to a set of six-sided drums, capped with an oval top. The building has four high, rectangular windows on each side. Inside, there is seating for more than 200 on the ground floor, with additional seating in a small balcony.²²

Columbus Baptist Church, Columbus (Lowndes), built a magnificent brick house of worship. Construction began in 1838 and was completed in 1840. The building was demolished around 1905 to build a new sanctuary, so descriptions are based upon photographs and a written description of one of the pastors. The worship center had some of the same early Greek Revival style of architecture as Woodville, but the Columbus sanctuary was larger and grander. In fact, Richard J. Cawthon, author of *Lost Churches of Mississippi*, says “it must have been the most elegant house of worship in Mississippi and one of the largest and finest Baptist meeting houses in the South.” The annual meeting of the MBC was held there on November 10–13, 1853, and the SBC was scheduled to meet there in 1863, but the meeting was canceled due to the Civil War. The sanctuary was located at the northeast corner of Seventh Street North (originally Caledonia Street) and First Avenue North (originally Military Street). Facing westward, it was a temple-form building, with a tetrastyle portico and four fluted columns in front. Above the triangular arch near the front was



Sanctuary of Woodville Baptist Church, Woodville (Wilkinson). Chartered on January 7, 1824, it is the oldest Baptist church building in Mississippi. It is located at 264 Natchez Street South, Woodville, Mississippi. *Photograph by Robert C. Rogers.*



Columbus Baptist Church, Columbus (Lowndes), built 1838-40. This building was demolished in 1905 to build a new sanctuary for First Baptist Church, Columbus. *Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission.*

an unusual steeple that appeared to copy the five-tier octagonal spire that Sir Christopher Wren placed on St. Bride's Church (Anglican), London, England, in the late seventeenth century. The steeple had a square base, which ascended in five tiers of eight-sided drums, each tier proportionately smaller as it rose higher. Inside the auditorium was a recessed area behind the pulpit with an organ and choir gallery. The windows indicated that it had a split-level interior with stairs to an elevated auditorium and stairs down to a level below, which was used "for the colored population." Its similarity to the Lyceum at the University of Mississippi, designed by architect William Nichols, indicates that Columbus Baptist Church could have also been designed by Nichols, who designed the Old State Capitol in Jackson.²³

The typical Baptist meeting house in Mississippi, though, was a simple building made of wood. Providence Baptist Church (Forrest) built its first house of worship in the 1820s. It had hewn logs for its walls, so the cracks in the walls were smaller and could be caulked more easily, and the roof was covered with cypress shingles, a sign of quality construction, for only the best log houses had this type of long-lasting roof. In 1843, the church put a stove heater in the building to replace the fireplace. In 1856, they completed a renovation, recovering it with "three foot boards to be got out of the heart of pine." This building, or parts of it, stood until 1910.²⁴

Bethesda Baptist Church (Hinds) erected its meeting house in 1846. In 1849, its members voted to build an addition to their church house "for the accommodation of" the Black members of the church. The addition was described in detail in the church minutes as 45 feet long and 12 feet wide, made of "good heart timber and to be put upon rock." The walls were to be nine feet high and two feet thick, and a door was to be installed on the side opposite the second window. The floor was to be made of planks one foot wide and one inch thick. Inside this addition, they were to build 15 pews that were 15 feet long, and 11 pews that were eight and a half feet long. These pews were to be 13 inches wide, and 18 inches from the floor. A contract was bid for the construction at a cost of \$118. In 1855, they made repairs to the building and added two pipe stoves for indoor heating. By 1858, they had added curtains to the windows, dug a well, planted china-berry trees outside the building, and built a graveyard near the building, which they enclosed with a gated fence.²⁵

Local church business and discipline

Church business meetings were normally held once a month on a Saturday, the day before the monthly worship service, and members were expected to attend. If they did not, the church often contacted them to ask why they were absent. Hopewell Baptist Church, Abbeville (Lafayette), even appointed a committee to visit a brother who wasn't coming to the business meeting to "try to convince him of the error of his ways and try to git [sic] him to attend at next conference." If they continued to fail to attend, the church might take stronger action. In the case of a "Brother Simmons and Sister Rogers" who had "absented from the church" for five years, Hopewell unanimously voted to consider them no longer members.²⁶

Churches excluded members from fellowship and restored them as well. It was not done lightly, although it was done more frequently than in modern times. In 1846, the 25 churches of the Mississippi Baptist Association recorded a combined total of 18 people excluded and six restored, and in 1847 the same churches recorded 11 excluded and four restored.²⁷

In rural communities, with limited law enforcement, the church was a powerful force in maintaining standards of conduct. In 1859, a member of Bethesda Baptist Church (Hinds) reported that he had "unintentionally killed someone's ox" and wanted it known that he was sorry and had not yet located the owner. In 1852, Sarepta Baptist Church (Franklin) excluded a member who was charged with "leaving his wife and his debts unsettled." In 1847, Hephzibah Baptist Church (Clarke) excluded a sister for "lying swearing bad treatment of her husband and ill usage of her little brother-in-law." In 1854, Sarepta appointed a committee of three people to investigate a charge against a member for "giting [sic] drunk and roling [sic] of ten pins on the ally in the town of Meadville." He was gambling at the bowling alley; the church expelled him the following month "for rolling of ten pins and betting money on said gain." The same year, Hopewell appointed a committee to investigate "certain reports circulating through the neighborhood" about their own church clerk, Danny Couch, "that he has been card playing gambling." After a full investigation, they found the report true, excluded him from the church, and elected a new church clerk.²⁸

It was not unusual for church members to freely confess their faults to the congregation, allowing the church to hold them accountable. In

1846, a “Brother Furr” confessed to Sarepta “that he got into a difficulty with Mr. Short, which ending in a fight to the injury of the cause of Christ the church forgave him.” In 1851, “Bro. W. Hollingsworth” confessed to Bethesda “that he had again drunk too much ardent spirits for which he was truly sorry; he wanted the church to deal faithfully with him and said he would quit the use of ardent spirits. The church agreed to bare [sic] with him.” In one case at Providence, a wealthy member withdrew on four different occasions between 1847 and 1865. He always returned and took an active part in church life. Despite all this church discipline, some practices were commonly accepted that would be considered unusual today. For example, it was normal for Baptists to chew tobacco while sitting in worship. In 1850, Bethesda voted to put 71 “spit-boxes” in their meeting house, at a cost of 3 cents each.²⁹

Both Black and White members were received for baptism and by letter with the “right hand of Christian fellowship” and called “brother and sister,” and both Black and White members received church discipline. In 1846, Hephzibah heard a report that a “colored sister Aggy” had “married a man who had a wife living.” They sent a committee to talk to her privately and reported she confessed it was true but refused to end the bigamous relationship, so she was excluded from membership. However, in 1853 the same Aggy was repentant, forgiven, and restored to the fellowship of the church. Bethesda had a special committee of five called “the committee to wait on the blacks.” It was their duty to recommend any church discipline among Black members, as well as to recommend any Black people who joined by experience of faith or church letter. This committee also invited “the widow Jones Peter to exhort the blacks when present.” In 1859, Bethesda charged a “Bro. J. T. Martin for striking with a stick and whipping a Negro boy of Bro. John H. Collins and against Bro. J. H. Collins prosecuting at law Bro. J.T. Martin and cultivating an unchristian spirit toward him.” A committee was sent to force the two men to reconcile, but when they refused, both men were excluded from membership. In April 1858, Ebenezer Baptist Church (Amite) investigated rumors that a member had killed an enslaved girl but accepted the testimony of two witnesses that her death was an accident. However, in December 1858, Ebenezer excluded a Peter A. Green because Green apprehended and killed one of his enslaved men who had escaped.³⁰

Significance of the local association

Baptist churches in Mississippi considered it important to belong to the Baptist association in their area, and frequent mention was made in church minutes of their relationship with the association. In fact, the local association was far more important to the local church than the state convention. Each church would prepare a written letter to send to the annual associational meeting, reporting on the ministry of their church, and the church would purchase printed minutes of the associational meeting, often buying enough copies of the minutes for every family in their congregation.

Since most Baptist churches were small and isolated, the annual associational meeting was an opportunity to gather with the larger community of Baptists. The meeting often lasted three days, typically Saturday through Monday. It was a time not only for business but also for worship and fellowship. Letters from the churches would be shared. A church dealing with a difficult issue would often submit a “query” to the association requesting the wisdom of the larger body. In 1846, the Mississippi associational meeting sounded more like a revival service than a business meeting. Gathered at Mount Zion Baptist Church (Franklin), the minutes described it as “a large and waiting congregation ... many persons came forward as mourners,” a reference to the mourner’s bench where repentant sinners came to the altar for prayer. Associations were also leaders in local missions. In 1851, Hephzibah Baptist Church (Clarke) took up a collection to “send to the Association to be applied to sending the gospel to destitute parts of the Association.” In 1860, Pearl River association met at Silver Creek Baptist Church (Lawrence), where they established a fund for the care of widows and orphans of deceased Baptist ministers and sponsored two missionaries to evangelize within their own associational field of ministry.³¹

On occasion, sister churches in an association or multiple associations were called on to work together to settle differences. In 1859, a dispute arose between Bethesda Baptist Church (Hinds) and White Oak Baptist Church (Copiah). Bethesda accused White Oak of receiving members from Bethesda who were under censure and had not been granted letters of dismission. An advisory council was called made up of members from three churches in the Central and Union associations: Utica Baptist Church (Hinds), Harmony Baptist Church (Copiah), and County Line

Baptist Church (Copiah). The advisory council met at White Oak on October 22, 1859, and heard from the pastors of both churches. The advisory council stated their opinion that there was fault on both sides, but “White Oak Church committed a violation of the rules that govern Baptist churches” by receiving the members without a letter, and the advisory laid down a principle: “It is the opinion of this council that a letter of dismission is the only proper passport from one Baptist church to another, and that churches who act contrary to this principle in receiving members violate that Christian courtesy which should ever exist between sister churches.”³²

Mississippi Baptist church life looked very different from church life today, although there was diversity among churches then as now. Wealthy enslavers worshiped with their enslaved people in majestic brick sanctuaries in towns, and slaveholding small farmers did the same in simple log-hewn buildings in the woods. They had prayer meetings, revival meetings, associational meetings, and business meetings; it’s appropriate that the church building was called the meeting house. Inside the meeting house, one might see a stove heater, wine for communion, bowls for foot washing, hymnals with Psalms set to rhyme, and spittoons for those who chewed tobacco. However, behind the outward form was a vibrant inward faith that would survive the incredible trials that the Baptists were about to face.

Chapter 7

The Civil War and Reconstruction 1861 – 1876

The period from 1861 to 1876 was one of division, destruction, disorganization, and reorganization. Southerners interpreted the election of Abraham Lincoln as president in November 1860 as Northern determination to end slavery. Southern states seceded, not waiting for Lincoln's inauguration in March 1861. Governor John H. Pettus convened the Mississippi legislature and advised withdrawal from the Union to escape "Black Republican rule." The legislature called for the election of delegates to a convention which met and adopted an ordinance of secession on January 9, 1861, making Mississippi the second state after South Carolina to secede from the Union. The delegates published "A Declaration of Independence," modeled after the U.S. Declaration of Independence, giving reasons for the secession. The foremost reason was, "Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery ... and a blow at slavery is a blow at commerce and civilization." Fearing the end of slavery, the declaration saw no other option: "We must either submit to degradation, and to loss of property worth four billions of money, or we must secede from the Union."¹

Not all Mississippians agreed. The aristocrats of Natchez opposed secession, and the yeoman farmers of Jones County lynched a replica of their delegate in effigy when they learned he had voted for secession. The hills

of Tishomingo County were full of White farmers who had no interest in slavery, and all four of their delegates voted against secession. Nevertheless, the majority of the state favored it. A woman in Jackson made a flag with a single white star and presented it to the secession convention, which inspired Harry McCarthy of Jackson to compose the popular Confederate war song, "The Bonnie Blue Flag." In a rapid succession of secession, several other Southern states joined South Carolina and Mississippi, and in February 1861 they organized the Confederate States of America. They chose Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, who had resigned from the U.S. Senate, to be their first and only president.²

White Baptist support for the Confederacy

Most White Mississippi Baptists enthusiastically supported the Confederate secession from the United States. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), Mississippi Baptist Convention (MBC), and many associations passed resolutions that endorsed the new government of the Confederate States of America, as well as resolutions encouraging Baptists to join its armies and fight for its cause. The first shots of the war were fired on Fort Sumter, South Carolina, in April 1861, and on May 23, the MBC met in Macon for a five-day session where they pledged "our fortunes and our lives, in the good work of repelling an invasion designed to destroy whatever is dear in our home institutions, whatever is sweet in our domestic hopes and enjoyments, whatever is essential to our institutions and our very manhood, whatever is worth living or dying for." At the time, they had no idea how many fortunes and lives were about to be destroyed.³

One Baptist association gave 40 copies of the New Testament to eight companies of soldiers. Strong River Baptist Association sent two of their ministers to be chaplains in the Confederate Army: Rev. Cader Price to the Sixth Regiment of the Mississippi Volunteers and J. L. Chandler to the Thirty-Ninth. At Mississippi College, nearly the entire student body joined the Confederate Army. The Mississippi College Rifles were the first to organize in 1861, made up of 32 students and three teachers: J. H. York, E. G. Banks, and M. J. Thigpen. Captain J. W. Welborn, a trustee of the college, commanded the company. The Mississippi College Rifles joined Robert E.

Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and participated in the Battle of Manassas and most of the major battles of the war over the next four years. The college continued to operate for the 1861–1862 school year, but as more students joined the army, the rest of the faculty resigned except for I. N. Urner, who cared for the college property and continued to instruct about 30 students who remained during the war years.⁴

The war's impact on Mississippi Baptists

Death and destruction hit home for Mississippians in the spring of 1862. On April 6 and 7, just 20 miles north of Corinth, the Battle of Shiloh was the bloodiest battle fought in the Americas to date. Soon after Shiloh, Confederate forces fell southward from Corinth to Tupelo, leaving Union forces in control of the railroads that met at Corinth. In May, Union forces took control of New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Natchez but failed in their attempt to take Vicksburg; they were driven back to Louisiana by Confederate forces under General John C. Breckinridge.⁵

As the war came to Mississippi, churches, associations, and the state convention struggled to meet. The MBC did not meet in 1862 or 1863. During this time, Union forces continued to seek ways to capture Vicksburg, which sat on high bluffs over the Mississippi River. Capturing Vicksburg would give the Union control of the Mississippi River and cut a wedge in the unity of the Confederacy. In November 1862, the Union army of General Ulysses S. Grant occupied Holly Springs but was forced to pull back in late December. Union General William T. Sherman attempted an amphibious assault down the Yazoo River but was defeated by Confederate forces under John C. Pemberton in the Chickasaw Bayou campaign, forcing the Union to withdraw by January 2, 1863.⁶

In April 1863, Grant attacked Vicksburg from the south while creating diversions with Union raids through central Mississippi. In May, Union forces occupied Port Gibson, located between Natchez and Vicksburg, and from there marched on Raymond and occupied Jackson. Confederates abandoned Jackson, retreating west to set up a defense to stop the Union march on Vicksburg. Confederate forces, and later Union forces, used the chapel and other buildings on the campus of Mississippi College as a field

hospital as Grant marched west from Jackson toward Vicksburg. According to local legend, Mrs. Adelia Hillman, who was supervising Central Female Institute in Clinton, marched into General Grant's headquarters and told him that it was inappropriate for the women of the college to be unprotected while his soldiers prowled about the town. General Grant reportedly sent a detachment to stand guard over the women of the college while his army was in the area. On May 16, Grant's army defeated Pemberton at the Battle of Champion's Hill near Edwards, forcing the Confederates to retreat to Vicksburg. Unable to break through defenses, on May 23, Grant decided to lay siege to Vicksburg, with the intention of starving the citizens into surrender. Day after day, bombs fell on the city. Vicksburg Baptist Church, Vicksburg (Warren), was "almost battered down" by the bombardment of the city, according to reports. Finally, Vicksburg surrendered to Grant on July 4, 1863. Now in command of Vicksburg, the Union was able to launch further attacks across Mississippi.⁷

With Vicksburg and central Mississippi under Union control, many Black Baptists in the region seized the opportunity to gain their freedom. In August 1863, Bethesda Baptist Church (Hinds) appointed a committee to investigate who "of the colored [sic] members had left and gone off with our enemies"; the following month they reported the names of nine Black members who had left, and the church voted to exclude them from membership.⁸

In early 1864, General Sherman began a march of his Union forces eastward from Vicksburg across central Mississippi. His objective was Meridian, a railroad junction and the most important town in the state still in Confederate hands. Union forces burned so much of Jackson that it was nicknamed "Chimneyville," because all that was left of many buildings were the chimneys. Crossing the Pearl River from Jackson to Brandon, Sherman famously uttered, "War is hell"—and that was exactly what he brought on central Mississippi. He covered 370 miles, letting his soldiers live off the land, taking crops, livestock, and other supplies from local farms; his soldiers wrecked railroads and destroyed property. By February 4, Sherman occupied Meridian. Northeast Mississippi remained a Confederate domain, where the cavalry of Nathan Bedford Forrest defeated a Union attack at Brice's Crossroads near Tupelo on June 10, 1864. In August, Forrest forced the Union to vacate Oxford and return to Memphis,

keeping northeast Mississippi in Confederate hands. Nevertheless, most of the South was under Union control, making communication with Confederate-controlled parts of the South next to impossible. In September 1864, Bethesda received a couple into membership from a Baptist church in Winchester, Tennessee, even though they could not present a church letter. Bethesda accepted this, recognizing that it was “impossible to get letters from Winchester, all communication being cut off by the enemy of our country.”⁹

Thousands of formerly enslaved people left plantations, and many took up arms for the Union, while thousands of White people deserted the Confederate Army. In July 1864, Sarepta Baptist Church (Franklin) requested their clerk to “arrace [sic] the name of any colored members from the church book that voluntarily goes to the Yankees.” Line Creek Baptist Church (Scott) appointed a committee “to keep blacks under subjection by the church” and charged runaway enslaved church members with “rebellion against the laws of the land.” In 1864, Pearl River Baptist Association encouraged its churches to discipline “any of their members who are guilty of the offense of deserting the service of the Confederate government,” yet the resolution also advised that churches “take into consideration palliating circumstances.” They were certainly aware of the anti-Confederate rebellion of White people in nearby Jones County led by a Baptist named Newton Knight, a deserter from the Confederate Army who objected to what many called “a rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight.” Knight was the “captain” of hundreds of deserters who hid in the Piney Woods; at times during the war they controlled parts of Jones County. Knight’s son Tom later recalled, “They were poor men. They had no Negroes to fight for, but most of them had a dear wife and little children that needed their protection at home. They came home and did their duty here in Jones County.”¹⁰

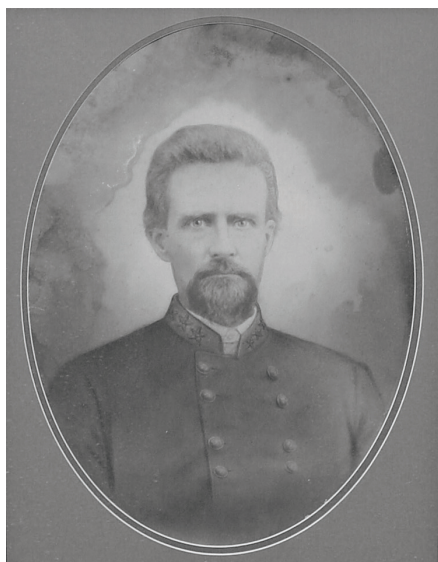
On April 9, 1865, when Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union General Ulysses S. Grant, there were only four remaining members of the Mississippi College Rifles among his soldiers; the others had been wounded, killed, or had left for other reasons. On May 22, Mississippi’s new governor, Charles Clark, who had been elected in 1863, surrendered to the United States Army, which put the state under military rule through the remainder of the post-war Reconstruction period.¹¹

Baptist chaplains and religious activity during the war

Mississippi's legislature made ministers exempt from military service, but many of them volunteered for the military as chaplains, and others took up arms as soldiers. H. H. Thompson, pastor of Sarepta Baptist Church (Franklin), served as a chaplain among the Confederate troops in southwest Mississippi while continuing to pastor his church in Franklin County. In July 1862, Sarepta recorded in its minutes the resignation of Pastor Thompson due to poor health: "Resolved, that we accept the Bro. Thompson's resignation but regret to part with him, as we found in him a faithful pastor, warm friend and devoted Christian, the cause of his resignation bad health. He has been laboring for some time under breast complaints and his service in the camps of the Army increased it to such extend that he sought medical advice which was that he should resign his pastoral labors." In October 1862, Central association called on churches to have monthly prayer meetings "for the success of our armies."¹²

Chaplains actively proclaimed the gospel among the Confederate soldiers in Mississippi, and Mississippians preached and heard the gospel as they fought in the war throughout the South. Matthew A. Dunn, a farmer from Liberty in Amite County, joined the state militia. From his military base in Meridian, Dunn wrote a letter to his wife in October 1863 that described nightly evangelistic meetings: "We are haveing [sic] an interesting meeting going on now at night—eight were Babtized [sic] last Sunday." Sarepta recorded that a chaplain in the Confederate Army baptized one of their own who accepted Christ while on the warfront: "Thomas Cater having joined the Baptist Church whilst in the Confederate Army and have since died." The baptismal certificate said he was baptized March 13, 1864, in Virginia by Chaplain Alexander A. Lomay of the 16th Mississippi Regiment.¹³

One preacher who joined the Confederate Army would later become president of the MBC and founder of Blue Mountain College. Mark Perrin Lowrey was a veteran of the Mexican War; he became a brick mason and, in 1852, a Baptist preacher. When the Civil War began, he was pastor of Ripley Baptist Church (Tippah) and Kossuth Baptist Church (Alcorn). Blue Mountain historian Robbie Neal Sumrall claimed that Lowrey did not believe in slavery, yet he went to Corinth and enlisted in the Confederate



Mark Perrin Lowrey.
*Photo courtesy of Blue Mountain
Christian University.*

Army. He was elected colonel and commanded the 32nd Mississippi Regiment. Lowrey commanded a brigade at the Battle of Perryville, where he was wounded. Most of his military career was in General Hood's campaign in Tennessee and fighting against Union General Sherman in Georgia. He was promoted to brigadier-general after his bravery at Chickamauga and played a key role in the Confederate victory at Missionary Ridge. In addition to fighting, he preached to his troops. One of his soldiers said he would "pray with them in his tent, preach to them in the camp, and lead them in the thickest of the fight in the battle." Another soldier said Lowrey "would preach like hell on Sunday and fight like the devil all week!" He was frequently referred to as the "fighting preacher of the Army of Tennessee." He led a revival among soldiers in Dalton, Georgia, and afterwards baptized 50 of his soldiers in a creek near the camp. After the war, the MBC elected Lowrey president for 10 years in a row, from 1868 to 1877.¹⁴

Columbus Baptist Church, Columbus (Lowndes), lost many members to the war, and many wealthy members lost their fortunes. Their pastor, Thomas C. Teasdale, resigned the church in 1863 to become an evangelist among the Confederate troops. He often preached to an entire brigade, and in one case, he preached a sermon on "The General Judgment" to 6,000 soldiers of General Claiborne in Dalton, Georgia. He baptized 80 soldiers after the sermon, and 60 more the next week. After the Union Army under

Sherman attacked, he was no longer able to preach to the soldiers and returned home to Columbus.¹⁵

The horrors of the Civil War caused many on the front lines and in the homeland to consider their eternal destiny. During the War of 1812, the Mississippi Baptist Association saw many people turn to faith in Christ. Similar revivals took place during the Civil War. In addition to revivals of religious faith in the military camps, in 1863 a series of revivals broke out among civilians in Starkville and other places across the state. Aberdeen association in north Mississippi reported that “some of the churches of our Association have been blessed with precious revivals of religion; abroad we hear of extensive revivals, and from the army the revival news is glorious.” Strong River association in central Mississippi celebrated 320 baptisms that year, compared to 79 in 1861.¹⁶

Despite revivals of faith, many Mississippi Baptist churches suffered declining attendance during the war, and some were unable to meet at all. Sarepta Baptist Church (Franklin) continued to meet throughout the war but did not meet in December 1864 or January 1865. Academy Baptist Church, Blue Mountain (Tippah), reported in November 1864, “Owing to the existence of the war and our exposed condition and the many raids of the Federal army we have had no regular preaching & no conference since Nov. 1862.” Likewise, Hopewell Baptist Church, Abbeville (Lafayette), had no church minutes from August 1862 through the end of the war. Interestingly, Bethesda Baptist Church (Hinds) continued to meet throughout 1863, even as General Grant’s armies were marching through the land. The only month Bethesda did not meet was July 1863, the month that Vicksburg fell in neighboring Warren County. In November 1864, Bethesda was busy discussing ways to “furnish the Confederate Army with Bibles, Testaments, and religious literature.”¹⁷

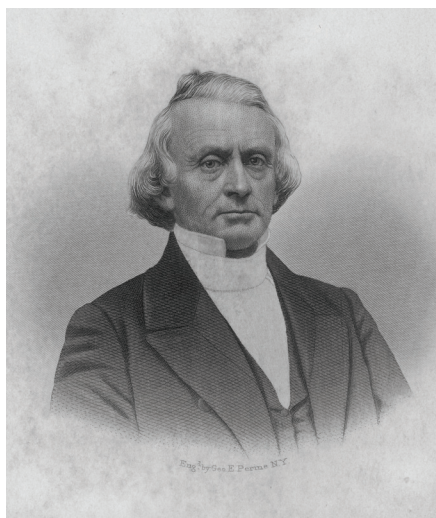
Often, the only religious activity in a community were prayer meetings led by White women. Churches that did meet began to record eulogies of the deaths of members. In April 1863, Sarepta eulogized the death of one of its members, Elijah Mullins, who died in the war. He was born on April 5, 1835, and joined the Confederate Army “to fight the battles of his country, and while standing at his post ... he fell a martyr at the alter [sic] of his country’s rights.” In January 1864, Sarepta recorded obituaries of two soldiers, brothers who were members of the church: Frederick Ward, who was

born December 7, 1840, and died in 1861, “in services of country fighting for the rights of man,” and James Ward, who was born September 8, 1842, and “died at his post like a true soldier fighting for the rights of man.” The church did not record the date of his death.¹⁸

Teasdale’s efforts on behalf of the orphanage

Knowing that Union victory was only a matter of time, the focus of Mississippi Baptists turned to rebuilding after the war. There are no surviving minutes from the MBC that met in Crawfordville in 1864 nor from the meeting in Meridian in 1865, but we know of an important event that occurred at the 1864 convention. There, the Baptists agreed to sponsor an orphanage. Since over 5,000 children of Mississippi Confederate soldiers were left fatherless, an interdenominational movement was started in 1864 to establish a home for them. Support came from several denominations, the Masonic Fraternity, and even “the military authorities,” who donated “a wagon and a team of two mules.” From later records, we know that on October 26, 1864, when the MBC met in Crawfordville, Baptists accepted responsibility for the project. The Orphans’ Home of Mississippi opened in October 1866 in Lauderdale Springs in Lauderdale County after considerable effort, especially by Thomas C. Teasdale.¹⁹

Teasdale was in a unique position to aid the home because of his influential contacts in both the North and South. In early 1865, he returned from preaching among Confederate soldiers to assist with the establishment of the home. He launched a creative, bold plan to raise money and solve the problem of donations. A large donation of cotton had been offered to the orphanage, which could bring 16 times more money in New York than Mississippi, but they didn’t know how to sell it in New York with the war still raging. Since Teasdale had been a pastor in Springfield, Illinois, and Washington, D.C., and had preached to the Confederate armies, he was personally acquainted with both U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, from Illinois, and Confederate President Jefferson Davis, as well as many of their advisers. In February and March 1865, he undertook a dangerous journey by horseback, boat, railroads, stagecoach, and foot, dodging Sherman’s march through Georgia and crossing through the lines of the armies



Thomas C. Teasdale.
*Reminiscences and Incidents
of A Long Life.*

of both sides. He conferred in Richmond and Washington, D.C., seeking permission from both sides to sell the cotton in New York for the benefit of the orphanage.²⁰

Confederate President Davis readily agreed, and on March 3, 1865, Davis signed the paper granting permission for the sale. Next, Teasdale slipped across enemy lines and entered Washington, D.C. He waited in line for several days for an audience with President Lincoln, but he could not get in because government officials in line were always a higher priority than private citizens. Finally, he sent a note to Lincoln saying that he was now a resident of Mississippi and that he was there on a mission of mercy. Lincoln received him, and he listened to the plea for cotton sales to support the orphanage. The president was skeptical. Why should he help Mississippi, a state in rebellion against the United States? In his autobiography, Teasdale records Lincoln's words: "We want to bring you rebels into such straits, that you will be willing to give up this wicked rebellion." Teasdale replied, "Mr. President, if it were the big people alone that were concerned in this matter, I should not be here, sir. They might fight it out to the bitter end, without my pleading for their relief. But sir, when it is the hapless little ones that are involved in this suffering, who, of course, who had nothing to do with bringing about the present unhappy conflict between the sections, I think it is a very different case, and one deserving of sympathy and commiseration." Lincoln said, "That is true; and I must do something for

you.” With that, on March 18, 1865, Lincoln signed the paper granting permission for the sale. However, a few days later, on April 9, Lee surrendered to Grant. By the time Teasdale returned home, the war was over, the permission granted by Jefferson Davis no longer had authority, and Lincoln was assassinated. Teasdale said, “This splendid arrangement failed, only because it was undertaken a little too late.” Undeterred, he volunteered as a fundraising agent for the orphanage and staked his large private fortune on its success.²¹

Destitution at the end of the war

The war devastated Mississippi economically, socially, and spiritually. By the end of the war, Mississippi Baptist churches and ministers all over the state were in desperate straits. The state convention reported in 1867, “Many churches and neighborhoods are so disorganized, broken down ... while, on the other hand, many of our most pious and efficient ministers are without the means of living while they preach the gospel.” The Columbus association reported: “Many of our churches are almost if not altogether extinct.” The Choctaw association said, “In this field there is considerable destitution; several churches without our bounds are without preaching; some have dissolved for the want of ministers.” The Panola association dissolved, and its four remaining churches joined the Coldwater association.²²

The loss of life caused immense social upheaval in the state. Around 78,000 White men fought for the Confederacy, and more than a third of them never came home. At least 17,000 Black men from Mississippi took up arms and fought for the Union. Cotton production dropped dramatically, partly because farmers tried to grow less cotton and more food to survive, but much of it was destroyed by flooding and foraging by the opposing armies and roving bands of deserters. Women were often left to manage farms by themselves; as Union armies arrived, many enslaved people left the farms to claim their freedom.²³

Despite the devastation after the war, there were some signs of encouragement and even evidence of revival. The Coldwater association reported: “In some of our churches we had some glorious revivals, unsurpassed in the history of our Association; while others report coldness and barren-

ness.” The Pearl River association said, “Considering the desolation and derangements produced by the late disastrous war ... it could not be reasonably expected that we should realize much mature fruit. ... But we have done something toward repairing losses.”²⁴

Post-war Reconstruction: Segregation of the churches

One the most significant social changes among Mississippi Baptists after the Civil War was the racial segregation of churches. Before the war, enslaved Black people constituted a substantial portion of Mississippi Baptist congregations. In the decade after the war, Black Baptists celebrated their new freedom by separating into independent, self-governing churches. In some areas this happened quickly, and in other parts of the state it was more gradual. Clinton Baptist Church, Clinton (Hinds), for example, had a membership of 283 in 1860, including 113 Black members. In 1866, with the absence of college students and withdrawal of Black members, the Clinton church was reduced to 36 members, and worship was only held once a month, led by a pastor from Raymond. In 1864, Jerusalem Baptist Church (Hinds) had 65 Black members, but all of them had left by 1866. Bethesda Baptist Church (Hinds) agreed in 1867 to allow Black members to hold a separate revival meeting, and later that year the church granted the following request: “The colored members signified a desire to withdraw from the church to organize an independent church and asked permission for the use of the church house one sabbath each month.” Likewise, Black members of Academy Baptist Church, Blue Mountain (Tippah), met separately after the war and had a Black preacher, but they used the Academy church building until the 1870s. Charles Moore, a formerly enslaved man and preacher after the war, expressed the common desire of Black Baptists: “I didn’t expect nothing out of freedom excepting peace and happiness and the right to go my way as I please. And that is the way the Almighty wants it.”²⁵

In other areas, Black church members continued to worship alongside White members in the same churches for a decade or more. Ebenezer Baptist Church (Amite) referred to Black members in its minutes through 1874; there was one more mention in 1877 of a Black member who asked

to be restored so that he could join New Hope Baptist Church (Amite). Although most churches remained integrated for several years, tensions began to arise, sometimes fueled by resentment over the war. For instance, in September 1865, five months after the war ended, "Eliza a colored woman" joined Sarepta Baptist Church (Franklin) by her experience of faith, and "it was moved and seconded that the right hand of fellowship be extended which was done with the exception of one brother who refused to give the right hand of fellowship to the colored woman Eliza."²⁶

White Baptist leaders encouraged their churches to let Black members make their own choices about leaving or staying. In 1870, Salem association in Jasper County recommended that if Black members "wish to form churches of their own, that they should be dismissed in order and assisted in doing so, but where they wish to remain with us as heretofore and are orderly, we think they should be allowed to do so." Black membership in Salem association declined from 206 in 1865 to 122 in 1870. As late as 1872, 81 Black people continued to worship in multiracial churches in the association, and Black members appeared in the records of Fellowship Baptist Church (Jasper) as late as 1876. Similarly, the Mississippi association reported 131 Black members in 1874.²⁷

In 1866, T. C. Teasdale, now chairman of the Committee on the Colored Population, reported to the state convention, "We owe it to them now" to care for the spiritual welfare of the freed Black people. The 1866 state convention also pledged that "we will use our influence in securing them just compensation for their labor, and protection and security against fraud or injustice." In 1877, T. G. Sellers, a later chairman of the Committee on the Colored Population, reported, "They are now to become citizens, enjoying equal rights with ourselves, both in Church and State." Noting that "a large majority of the colored population are Baptists," the committee called on White Baptists to promote schools to educate Black people and establish "Sabbath Schools ... that they may have the gospel preached to them." The state convention spoke noble words on ministry to Black people, but the attitude was patronizing. In the 1868 Report on the Colored Population, N. L. Clark said, "We claim to be their superior, let us evidence it by condescending labors of love for their spiritual and eternal good. This we can best do by faithfully preaching the Gospel to them, and encouraging the interests of education among them." There was more condescending talk

than actual labor of love. As late as 1874, T. J. Walne reported that the American Baptist Home Mission Society had declined to send “a missionary to labor among the colored people” of Mississippi. The state missions board claimed a desire to minister among the Black population and then seemed to admit that any real work was happening on the local church level: “We would also suggest that our pastors could do much for this people in their respective localities. Some of our pastors are at work in this direction, and are doing a good work—they visit their churches, preach for them, and some have classes of colored ministers, with whom they meet regularly and instruct them in God’s word.”²⁸

A few years after the war, H. P. Jacobs came from Michigan to help Black Baptists organize their own associations. Jacobs had outwitted his enslaver and Confederate forces and escaped north to Canada. While living in the North, Jacobs studied and prepared himself for ministry. In 1868, he came to Natchez, and by the end of the year he had organized three associations of Black Baptists. In July 1869, delegates from 14 Black Baptist churches assembled in Macon to organize the Mt. Olivet Baptist Association. They requested the assistance of two local White ministers. The assembly approved Articles of Faith and Rules of Decorum borrowed directly from White Baptist associations, and Mt. Olivet association sent corresponding messengers to Choctaw association and other White associations in their area. By 1873, the General Missionary Baptist Association of Mississippi, the statewide organization of Black churches, included 327 churches with 29,524 members. By 1876, more than 25 Black associations existed in Mississippi.²⁹

Black preachers were often among the best educated and most respected men in their communities. Most Black Baptist churches required their pastors to have an education. First Saints Baptist Association, one of the first Black associations organized in Mississippi, pledged “never to ordain a minister who cannot read the Scriptures.” Under the protection of military rule, Black ministers were often involved in Reconstruction politics and were loyal to the Republican Party. This meant that they were regularly victims of violence, as White people did everything in their power to take back control of the political machinery in the 1870s. During a riot in Meridian in 1871, White people killed at least 30 Black people and burned a Black Baptist church. The Mt. Olivet Baptist Association demanded that “it

is the moral duty of the City of Meridian to replace that [Baptist] house.”³⁰

Black Baptists who worshiped in independent congregations celebrated their newfound freedom to worship as they pleased. One common religious practice was called “traveling,” which was an emotional conversion experience filled with visions. A Northern missionary, Maria Waterbury, reported a baptism in 1872 where 24 Black people were baptized in the Tombigbee River. She wrote, “An old man said, ‘I started traveling, and went on, and on, until I come to old hell, and I see the devil, and asked him if I might plow there. He said I might, and I plowed two furrows on the fiery mane of hell. Then I see an old woman with her hair all burnt off. Then I see a pair of balances and was weighted in them and was light as a feather. If I’d knowed God was such a sweet God, I’d prayed my knees to the bone.’” Waterbury also reported an Afro-Baptist worship service in which members rose to their feet, shaking hands, singing, shouting, and swaying up and down, circling among each other, shaking hands and moving their feet as if to music. The preacher came down from the pulpit and joined in, and when the pastor lifted his hand, the noise instantly stopped, and he pronounced a benediction. One member explained to her, “That’s what is called the Heavenly Dance.”³¹

Post-war Reconstruction: Rebuilding Baptist ministries

A half dozen Mississippi Baptist pastors survived the Civil War and emerged afterwards to lead the state convention and SBC during the Reconstruction era. The first leader was Thomas C. Teasdale, the former pastor of Columbus Baptist Church, Columbus (Lowndes). In 1869, Teasdale was elected as the corresponding secretary of the Sunday School Board of the SBC, where he served until 1871. Although Teasdale strengthened the financial condition of the Sunday School Board, his heart was in evangelism, a calling to which he returned for most of his remaining years. He was the author of three books: *Revival Discourses*, *Manual of Baptism and Communion*, and his autobiography, *Reminiscences and Incidents of a Long Life*. A second leader was Zachariah Reeves, the evangelist from southwest Mississippi, who was moderator of the Mississippi association for over 20 years. A third leader was Norvell Robertson, Jr., who was pastor of Beth-

any Baptist Church (Lawrence) for 44 years. His book, *Church-members' Hand-book of Theology*, published in 1874, was considered a classic work in its time. A fourth leader after the Civil War was Daniel P. Bestor, who succeeded Teasdale as pastor of the influential Columbus Baptist Church, and a fifth was Benjamin Whitfield, the Hinds County pastor who had served as president of the state convention for five sessions after the war. The sixth was Mark Perrin Lowrey, who served as president of the MBC and founded Blue Mountain College.³²

In 1869, Lowrey and J. B. Gambrell stood in the yard outside Academy Baptist Church, Blue Mountain (Tippah), discussing the need for a women's college in north Mississippi. Lowrey wanted a good education for his daughters and dreamed of starting a college of his own. Gambrell encouraged him, and Lowrey purchased the two-story antebellum home of Frederick Brougher in Tippah County for the school. He was trying to decide on a name for the school when Annie Davidson White told him a story. "When I was a girl in Ripley, we young people were accustomed to drive out frequently to see the daughters of Colonel Brougher. ... Three miles this side of Ripley, there is a turn in the road where this big hill looms into view. It was then covered with pines, and in the early morning there seemed to be a blue tint on the pine-covered hill, and we called it Blue Mountain." Instantly, General Lowrey said, "That's my name! Blue Mountain Female Institute!" Lowrey opened the school on September 12, 1873, with 40 students. Although the proprietor was Baptist, the college employed teachers of various Christian denominations, and a Baptist and Methodist congregation started in the village of Blue Mountain that grew up around the school. In 1877, the name was changed to Blue Mountain College. By 1882, there were 148 students, 81 of them boarders. Lowrey died in 1885, and his oldest son, William Tyndale Lowrey, succeeded him as president of the college from 1885 until 1898, when he became president of Mississippi College.³³

The Orphans' Home of Mississippi opened on October 1, 1866, in Lauderdale Springs, with "two little girls and one mother" under the supervision of S. S. Granberry. By 1867 it housed 136 children from 24 counties, and by 1868 it housed 232 children. Hundreds more applied but were denied due to "inability to provide for more," and thus the enrollment only increased to 264 in 1869. The home was as close to self-supporting as pos-

sible. It published a paper known as *The Banner*, operated a grist mill and feed mill, and cultivated a farm of more than 300 acres. The orphans themselves raised an adequate supply of pork and beef and tended a large vegetable garden. The home admitted some mothers along with their children, and these women were tasked with supervising the older girls in household tasks, including cooking, washing, and sewing. The home received generous support from the Masonic Fraternity and various denominations, and although it was under Baptist control, it included trustees from other denominations and operated a non-sectarian Sabbath School using literature from the American Sunday School Union.³⁴

In 1869, trustees discovered that the title deed to the land the orphanage occupied was faulty. The trustees tried to negotiate with the claimants but finally had to relocate the orphanage to “government buildings” a mile north of Lauderdale Springs. This added to the debt and caused dissatisfaction among some supporters. Facing bankruptcy in 1875, the home suspended operation. In the report of the MBC Executive Committee, W. H. Hardy explained why the Baptists closed the home: “The institution is without money, without supplies, without credit. ... The Home has performed its mission. It raised and educated hundreds of orphans of Confederate soldiers, and with that the people lost interest in it ...” Granberry, the superintendent, stayed at the home to dispose of the property and find homes for the remaining “twenty-five or thirty little children not yet provided with homes.” Although the orphanage closed in 1875, it set a precedent for a more permanent Baptist Children’s Village in Mississippi some 20 years later.³⁵

The other major post-war concern of the state convention was Mississippi College: “The unyielding hand of grim-visaged war was laid upon her, and, like the stately oak scathed by the lightning of heaven, she withered in its grasp.” Benjamin Whitfield, president of the board of trustees at Mississippi College, reported more bluntly, “The College is in a critical condition.” This was due to two financial obligations hanging over its head: scholarships that had not been honored and the unpaid salary of President Urner, who had watched over the college during the war. The school had sold 185 scholarships before the war to raise the endowment, but after the war the college had no funds to honor the scholarships. To address this problem, the trustees employed M. T. Martin, a professor, to travel

throughout the state and solicit the owners of the scholarships to donate them to the college. Martin was remarkably successful.³⁶

To solve the other financial problem, Mississippi College's trustees called on the aid of Walter Hillman, president of the Central Female Institute in Clinton. After the war, Hillman had acquired ownership of Central Female Institute and paid its debt. Since the success of the two schools were closely intertwined, his wife agreed to travel through the North to solicit donations. Thanks to her fundraising, along with a generous loan from Hillman, the debt was paid off. Hillman also solicited the Baptist state conventions in Arkansas and Louisiana to adopt Mississippi College as their Baptist institution. Those conventions agreed, and they were allowed to elect trustees in return for their financial support. Finally, the loan from Hillman was paid in full, and in 1872, the board declared, "Our College is now out of debt." Benjamin Whitfield, longtime president of the board of trustees, died in 1872 and did not live to give this report. The board gave tribute to Whitfield's dedication to the college, noting how he saved the college just prior to the war, and despite "destruction of his property" during the war he still "made an absolute gift of a liberal portion of the means remaining to him" to save the college financially after the war. In 1873, the college reported that attendance had steadily increased each school year, from 29 students in 1867–1868 to 190 in 1872–1873.³⁷

In its 1867 meeting, the state convention requested that the Domestic Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention appoint "one or more evangelists" to travel the state, preaching to "both white and black," and starting "Sabbath Schools." The next year, they reported that the board gave aid to pastors in Vicksburg, Grenada, Oxford, Corinth, "and other points," and sent M. P. Lowrey as "Evangelist for the State ... to strengthen those Churches that are ready to die." This same Lowrey came to the 1868 state convention as a delegate from Tippah association, and he was elected president of the convention; he continued to serve as president for the next 10 years. Historian John T. Christian called him "one of the most useful and distinguished men in Mississippi." In 1869, an enthusiastic young Sunday school worker named T. J. Walne gave a report to the state convention on the "weak and helpless condition" of Vicksburg Baptist Church, Vicksburg (Warren); he pointed to the importance of having a strong Baptist presence in the key river port city. Not surprisingly, the Vicksburg church

selected Walne as their pastor. Under his leadership, a year later, the church reported a threefold increase in membership, a growing Sunday School, and repairs in progress on the house of worship that had been bombarded during the siege of Vicksburg in 1863. The convention appointed missionaries to the following towns: J. A. Hackett to Jackson, E. D. Miller to Holly Springs, R. H. Whitehead to Oxford, and A. A. Lomax to Yazoo City.³⁸

The mission of revitalizing churches and planting new churches across the state was done on three distinct levels: by the SBC, the MBC, and local associations. Although Mississippi Baptists requested support from the Southern Baptist Domestic Mission Board, in 1873 they organized their own Board on State Missions, headquartered in Hazelhurst in Copiah County. They chose Walne to lead the work, with the title of corresponding secretary. The state missions board expressed a clear desire to cooperate with the mission work of the associations. Many associations also sponsored their own missionaries; a dozen associations had one or two missionaries each working the local fields. In 1874, these associational missionaries reported to the state convention five new churches and 12 Sunday schools organized.³⁹

The state missions board desired no overlapping effort or friction with the associations. However, there were associations, at first, which did not take kindly to the state missions board. Dr. John L. Johnson described the challenge this way: "The Coldwater Association, one of the best in the State now, has not always been so. Walne went and they squelched him. Gambrell went the next year, and he came back looking more like a pancake that is spread all over the skillet when there was not enough dough to cover it. The next year they said I must go. I went, and announced myself as the president of the State Mission Board; and the moderator said: We have a good place for you—right over there in the corner, and there I sat! I felt like a fool and at the time I knew I was not a fool—did you ever feel that way? At night I preached to them—at their request—and after the sermon, Bro. E. E. King arose and said, let's take a collection! The moderator said, No! I said to him, Sit down sir, the Association is not in session now. We are going to take up a collection and we got \$700 pledged that night. That's the way we had to take collections in those days—lift it as by a Jack-screw."⁴⁰

Not only did the state convention have the challenge of getting the cooperation of associations, but also it had competition from two general

Baptist bodies operating in the state, the General Baptist Association of North Mississippi and the General Baptist Association of South Mississippi and East Louisiana. The north Mississippi group had been under the influence of William Carey Crane, the Landmark Baptist leader who had formed the separate group just prior to the Civil War. In 1866, the MBC invited both groups to a meeting to discuss uniting. The northern group did not respond, but it soon disbanded, so it was no longer an issue. The southern group considered the matter for a few years. J. A. Hackett spoke to the southern group at their meeting in Summit on April 17–18, 1874. After hearing Hackett, they voted to unite with the MBC. This union not only strengthened Mississippi Baptist work in south Mississippi, but it also brought into the state convention all the territory of Louisiana east of the Mississippi River, known as the “Florida Parishes.” This included a well-established church in Baton Rouge as well as the vast missionary field of New Orleans. In annexing part of Louisiana into the MBC, the convention was careful to point out, “It should be borne in mind that this is no effort to divide and draw off a part of the territory of the Louisiana Baptist Convention.” They noted that before the Civil War, the Mississippi Baptist Association had included some churches in southeast Louisiana, and the churches and associations of east Louisiana were not connected to the Louisiana Baptist Convention (which, until 1853, had been known as the Baptist State Convention of North Louisiana), due to the geographical barrier of the Mississippi River.⁴¹

The Sunday school movement began to gain steam after the Civil War. In the years from 1866 to 1869, at least 24 new Sunday schools were organized around the state. In 1868, the Baptist Sunday School Convention of Mississippi was organized in Meridian, with representatives from 16 churches in the state, all from north and central Mississippi. They adopted the motto, “A Sunday School in every Baptist Church, and in every destitute neighborhood of the State.” Southern Baptists published a popular children’s booklet for Sunday schools, called *Kind Words*, which was used in many Mississippi Baptist churches.⁴²

One of the “destitute” areas of the state that lacked Baptist work was south Mississippi, especially the Gulf Coast. In 1868, the state convention listed the names of the Baptist ministers in Mississippi and their post offices, nearly all of which were in north or central Mississippi. Not a single

Baptist minister resided on the Mississippi coast. In 1873, W. H. Hardy of Meridian called attention to the lack of Baptist churches in Jones, Perry, Greene, Harrison, and Hancock counties, and “the populous towns along the sea shore.” He called for the convention to send missionaries to Pascagoula or Pass Christian “or some other convenient point.” In 1875, the convention sent John B. Hamberlin as a missionary to the Mississippi coast, where, he reported, there was “only one little Baptist church, and that in a disorganized state.” This church was three miles from Ocean Springs, and he relocated it into the town; it became First Baptist Church, Ocean Springs (Jackson). He also started Moss Point Baptist Church (Jackson), which built a house of worship. Next, he targeted Biloxi, where “Roman Catholicism overshadows everything.” He found “a poor old widow” who was the only member left of a small Baptist congregation that once had a house of worship there. “He got possession of the old house, made some repairs upon it; has conducted two special meetings, and has recently organized a church of seventeen members.” Sadly, a yellow fever epidemic in 1876 took the life of Hamberlin’s wife while they were in Biloxi, and he sent his small child inland to get away from the epidemic while he returned to his mission work on the coast. Hamberlin wrote, “My wife is dead; my home is broken up; my child is gone, and my heart is desolate; but I hope in the future to be a better man, and to do more and better work for Christ than ever before.”⁴³

A change to Article III in the Constitution of the MBC was proposed in 1866 and adopted in 1867, on a motion from Benjamin Whitfield, to remove the privilege of “individual membership” in the convention by large donors and instead allow delegates to be chosen by associations and Baptist benevolent societies. This was a move away from the society method of representation toward the associational method as well as a nod toward Landmarkism’s emphasis on the local church, a sign that the convention felt secure and stable enough to allow this broad representation.⁴⁴

In 1876, the centennial of America’s Declaration of Independence, Mississippi Baptists took time to think about their own history. During the 1876 state convention, J. A. Hackett rose to speak about “the early history of the Baptists of Mississippi, and offer you a memorial of the times.” He told how he and several other ministers had traveled to Amite County and “stood, with head uncovered, by the grave of Richard Curtis, Jr., the first

Baptist preacher that ever proclaimed the glorious gospel of the beloved God in the unbroken forests of Mississippi.” Hackett retold the story of how Curtis started Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson) on Coles Creek and of how Curtis was persecuted for his faith but finally returned to preach “in the full enjoyment of religious liberty.” At the conclusion of his speech, Hackett presented a gavel to the president of the convention in memory of Salem and Richard Curtis.⁴⁵ This historical remembrance indicated how Mississippi Baptists, now 43,000 strong, had come of age. Mississippi Baptists had survived persecution as a religious minority, they had survived the destitution of a Civil War, and they were stronger than ever—strong enough to pause and look back on that history, confident in a great future.

Chapter 8

The Last Years of the 19th Century 1877 – 1899

During the last years of the 19th century, Mississippi was in a constant state of uproar, awakening to a new era after the stagnation of the Reconstruction era, which officially ended on February 26, 1877, when Republican President-elect Rutherford B. Hayes promised to withdraw the Federal troops from the South.¹

In Mississippi, this political period began in the early 1870s. During Reconstruction, Republicans had taken control of the Mississippi legislature and governor's office, and many Black people had been elected to public office. In 1873, the legislature raised taxes to the highest level in Mississippi history, enraging many White people. In 1874, a White grand jury in Vicksburg indicted Black officials on corruption charges, and a race riot erupted, leaving at least two White people and 29 Black people dead. In 1875, White Democrats developed a strategy they called the "First Mississippi Plan" that used intimidation and physical violence to keep thousands of Black people from voting; in addition, they stuffed ballot boxes and destroyed Republican ballots. These actions helped a coalition party of Democrats, Whigs, and White Republicans to defeat the Republican supporters of Governor Adelbert Ames in all but 12 counties and elect Democrats to four of the six United States congressional seats. In early 1876, the Democrats used their new power to impeach several Republican state officials;

Governor Ames resigned before his impeachment trial took place. The new governor, John M. Stone, soon filled enough judicial vacancies that all three branches of government were under the control of conservative White Democrats. Therefore, in 1877, when Rutherford B. Hayes agreed to withdraw Federal troops from the South to guarantee enough support in Congress for his election, he also guaranteed White political control of Mississippi for generations to come. This was solidified in 1890 when a new state constitution was written, with restrictions on the right to vote that effectively disenfranchised Black people.²

Segregation of Mississippi Baptist churches started out as a post-war celebration of freedom for Black people, but by the 1890s, it had also become the expectation of White Baptists. The Mississippi Baptist Convention (MBC) assumed that their churches were made up of White members only, and in 1890, the state convention referred to itself as: "The Mississippi Baptist Convention ... representing a denomination of 80,000 white Christians." The convention maintained cordial relations with Black Baptists; when the Black convention, the General Baptist Convention of Mississippi, met at the same time as the White MBC, they frequently exchanged telegrams of Christian greetings. The MBC sponsored Bible institutes for Black Baptist pastors and deacons, and the state convention encouraged White pastors to donate their time to teach at these institutes across the state.³

This period was also one of intense interest in patriotic, moral, and educational movements. Such organizations as the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Kings Daughters, Young Men's Christian Association, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union enjoyed popular support. Frances E. Willard, one of the most famous temperance activists in the nation, spent a month in Mississippi in 1882 and announced, "Mississippi is the strongest of the Southern State W.C.T.U. organizations." Every Baptist association had a temperance committee. T. J. Bailey, a Baptist minister, was the superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League. Prohibition of alcohol was such an emotionally charged issue that a liquor supporter assassinated Roderic D. Gambrell, son of Mississippi Baptist leader J. B. Gambrell and the editor of a temperance newspaper, *The Sword and Shield*. Nevertheless, the temperance movement was so successful that by 1897, all but five counties in Mississippi had outlawed the sale of liquor.⁴

In 1878 a yellow fever epidemic, originating in New Orleans, spread across Mississippi, causing thousands of people to flee their homes in panic. The epidemic caused many Mississippi Baptist churches to close for months. Baptist mission work was put on hold, especially from July 1878 to January 1879. In 1879, the state missions board reported that the epidemic hit nine of their mission stations and killed 10,000 people in the state, including three board members: A. F. Moore of Holly Springs; Dr. N. W. Wilson, pastor of the Coliseum Place Baptist Church, New Orleans; , Louisiana, and H. T. Haddick, pastor of the Grenada Baptist Church, Grenada (Grenada), which was the host church of that year's state convention.⁵

Economic changes were also occurring as the plantation system was replaced by the tenant system. Sharecroppers became victims of this system, and the landlord found himself bound to the banker or person who advanced him credit. Banks charged as much as 1.5% interest per month. An antiquated tax system, falling heaviest upon property owners, ground down the farmer. Only those farmers who were able to establish stores were able to survive the combination of falling cotton prices and high taxes. Industrialization began to fill a vacuum and reduce both the domain and majesty of King Cotton, which dropped in price from 31½ cents in 1866 to 5¾ cents in 1898.⁶

Massive migration from the northern part of the Mississippi Valley followed the building of the railroads, and Mississippi's population increased 20% in the 1890s. Baptist leader William Harris Hardy, a judge and MBC president from 1880 to 1885, built the New Orleans and Northeastern Railroad from New Orleans to Meridian in 1883, and the same year he established the new town of Hattiesburg halfway up that railroad, strategically located in the midst of the Piney Woods, with its virgin lumber. Lumber barons began large-scale exploitation of Mississippi's forests. By 1893, there were 59 sawmills in the Hattiesburg vicinity; by the turn of the century, these sawmills shipped out 300 million board feet by rail, and the city of Hattiesburg had 4,175 residents. By 1900, Hardy had finished the Gulf & Ship Island Railroad from Jackson to the new town of Gulfport.⁷

By 1885, there were a dozen Baptist schools and colleges across the state in addition to Mississippi College and Blue Mountain College. Many new educational institutions opened during this time, including the Agricultural and Mechanical College in Starkville (present-day Mississippi State

University), and the Industrial Institute and College in Columbus (present-day Mississippi University for Women). Formerly enslaved people were also eager for education, especially for their pastors, and were assisted by Northern Baptists. The American Baptist Home Mission Society of New York established Natchez Seminary in 1877 “for the instruction of preachers and teachers of the colored people.” It was moved to Jackson in 1882, where it was renamed Jackson College (present-day Jackson State University). Mississippi Baptists heartily supported the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, which relocated from Greenville, South Carolina, to Louisville, Kentucky, in 1878. After the Civil War, Mississippi College established a chair of theology until 1877, and after that, a ministerial society met on the campus each week to have theological discussions, led by J. B. Gambrell and M. Thomas Martin.⁸

Church planting and other ministries

Under corresponding secretary T. J. Walne, the state missions board, the headquarters of which had been in Hazlehurst, led the way in reaching into unchurched areas of Mississippi and parts of Louisiana. Walne chose the motto, “A Baptist Church in every town and in every neighborhood throughout the territory.” During its existence, the state missions board fostered some degree of cooperation between associations and the state convention, although some associations refused, out of fear of centralization. The state was divided into districts, and an evangelist was stationed in each section. H. L. Findley, L. E. Hall, Walter Edwin Tynes, R. A. Massey, Edmund Boston Miller, and Oscar D. Bowen were chosen to serve as evangelists in these districts. From 1879 to 1884, D. I. Purser and John F. Purser, a singer, were employed as “general evangelists” for the state. White and Black evangelists were sent to minister among the Black congregations.⁹

John B. Hamberlin planted five churches on the Mississippi Gulf Coast in the early 1870s, early seeds which, in 1877, sprouted into the Gulf Coast Baptist Association, an organization that stretched across the Mississippi and Louisiana coasts, including the Baptist churches of New Orleans. In 1875, the state missions board turned its focus to the Mississippi Delta. This area in northwest Mississippi, between the Yazoo and Mississipp-

pi rivers, was called “The Bottoms.” The board described it as a “veritable Sodom,” where “whiskey drinking, gambling and Sabbath-breaking were common and prevailing sins of the country.” It was difficult to get men to leave “good pastorates in the hills” to serve in the Delta, since high water in spring and winter hindered travel, and “the Bottom is extremely unhealthy,” the board reported in 1879. Nevertheless, William C. Friley and Walter Compere Lattimore served as missionaries there. In 1881, four men were stationed in this section, and Lewis Ball was the general evangelist for the area.¹⁰

At the time, MBC work included the Florida parishes of southeastern Louisiana. In 1879 the Baptists of New Orleans appealed for help, and the state missions board appointed W. H. Tucker as the city missionary to New Orleans. In 1882, the state missions board commissioned a woman, whose name was recorded as “Mrs. M. H. Nelson,” to do mission work among the children of New Orleans, until the Louisiana Baptist State Convention took over the work. Louisiana Baptists sent W. E. Tynes to start the First Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1874. By 1877, the church was struggling, having only 27 members, 20 of whom were women, so they appealed to the MBC for help. Under the pastorate of L. S. Piker, a small building was erected by the church. By 1890, the churches around Baton Rouge affiliated with the Louisiana Baptist Convention. Other Baptist churches in the Florida parishes followed in this gradual transition of allegiance from the Mississippi State Convention to the Louisiana State Convention by the 1890s.¹¹

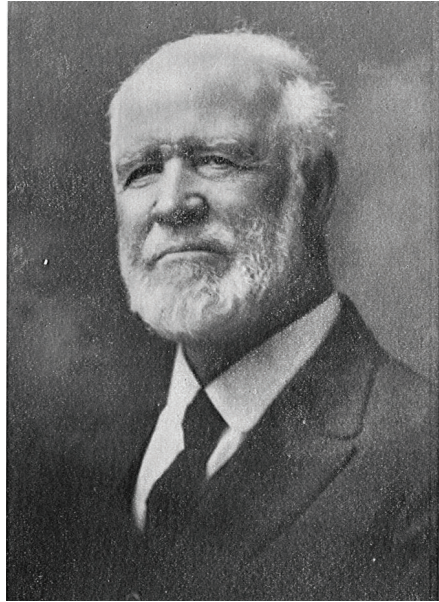
In 1881, Janie L. Sanford, daughter of Mark P. Lowrey, was appointed as missionary to the Chinese in California by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. Mississippi Baptists pledged their support. The same year, the American Baptist Publication Society proposed to donate \$1,000 worth of books to the state convention and to provide 10 colporteurs, or sellers of religious literature. The state convention hired nine colporteurs in 1882. Not only did they sell Bibles and other literature, but colporteurs went “from house to house, from neighborhood to neighborhood, from church to church, and from Association to Association,” preaching the gospel, organizing Sunday schools, and praying with people. In July 1888, the Mississippi Baptist Historical Society was incorporated and chartered by the state of Mississippi. It immediately began collecting documents and

sharing research papers on historical events that occurred earlier in the century. However, the society ceased to function as a chartered organization around 1904, although a similar society, unchartered, later inherited the materials.¹²

In 1891, the trustees of Central Female Institute in Clinton changed the school's name to Hillman College. It continued to serve as a sister school to the all-male Mississippi College, but since it no longer had direct ties to the Central Baptist Association, the trustees renamed the school in honor of the owners of the property, Walter Hillman, president from 1856 to 1894, and his wife, Adelia, who taught there and had the title "lady principal;" she served as president until around two years after her husband's death. In addition to her service to the college, Adelia Hillman was active in the Temperance movement, Mississippi WMU, and was a charter member, librarian, and board member of the Mississippi Baptist Historical Society. In 1897, she sold Hillman College to George Wharton, and she retired.¹³

Gambrell's role in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board

Interestingly, it was Mississippi Baptist leader J. B. Gambrell who reluctantly played a key role in the establishment of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, the forerunner of what is now called LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention. Through most of the 1800s, the American Baptist Publication Society (ABPS) was the principal publisher of Sunday school materials for both Northern and Southern Baptists. This continued for decades after the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was organized in 1845. Southern Baptists had their own publishing board for a short time, but it could not compete with the ABPS, and it folded. However, the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board began to publish the children's Sunday school quarterly *Kind Words*. It was so popular that in 1888 the series reached five million readers. This caused much jealousy from the ABPS, and there was some subtle pressure put on the Home Mission Board to stop publishing *Kind Words*. In response, Virginia pastor James M. Frost announced in 1890 that he would make a motion that Southern Baptists have their own publishing board. I. T. Tichenor, presi-



J. B. Gambrell

*Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Baptist
Historical Commission*

dent of the Home Mission Board, unselfishly supported the idea, willing to let *Kind Words* and other literature be published by a new organization. However, Gambrell opposed the idea of another board, so SBC leaders assigned Gambrell and Frost to work together on a report that all Southern Baptists could support.¹⁴

Gambrell and Frost spent the day in a hotel room discussing what kind of report to make. Gambrell held Landmark Baptist views, and he was concerned that a publishing board would centralize too much power in the denomination and would threaten the right of the local church to choose whatever literature they desired. Gambrell proposed to let Frost write the report and choose the name and the location of the proposed board, provided Gambrell could write the closing paragraph. Frost agreed, with the caveat that he be allowed to add one sentence. The report they gave to the SBC in 1891 proposed that a new board be created, to be called the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, with headquarters in Nashville. This board would publish Sunday school material, including *Kind Words*, as well as other books and literature. Gambrell added a paragraph clarifying for those Landmarkists who supported local church authority, “that the fullest freedom of choice be accorded to every one as to what literature he will use.” Frost added the last sentence urging “all

brethren to give to this Board a fair consideration.” Although the 1891 MBC commended the work of the American Baptist Publication Society “in furnishing a sound Baptist literature,” at the same meeting, the state convention endorsed the new Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and commended to Mississippi Baptists their “sympathy and patronage.” Gambrell was one of those who spoke in favor of this resolution, which was adopted unanimously.¹⁵

Missions to the Choctaws

The Choctaws, the largest tribe of American Indians in Mississippi, were long resistant to the Christian gospel due to its association with White oppression. Black Baptists had more success than White Baptists in reaching many Choctaws. Choctaws and Black people shared the experience of Jim Crow segregation, and many worked as tenant farmers alongside one another. Some Choctaws began to attend services at a Baptist church organized by Black people near Carthage around 1878. The Mt. Pisgah Baptist Association asked the Choctaw and Chickasaw Baptist Convention of Oklahoma to send a missionary to Mississippi. Peter Folsom, whose ancestors had preached to the Choctaws in the 1820s, answered the call and went to Mississippi. Despite failing health, in the eight months before he died, Folsom baptized 40 people, started a church, and ordained one Choctaw minister. The work prospered, as Choctaws felt comfortable with the democratic, autonomous ways of self-governed Baptist churches. In 1888 the New Choctaw Baptist Association organized, with 300 members. By 1891, they had eight churches in five counties: three in Newton, two in Leake, and one each in Jasper, Neshoba, and Perry counties; also, the association had six ordained Choctaw pastors: Benjamin Thomas, Isham Johnson, Thompson Baker, Allen Willis, Indian Jackson, and Charles Sturdivant, known as “Big Charley,” and two licensed preachers, Seburn Smith and Billy Gibson. The MBC gave regular reports on their progress, crediting the General Baptists (Black Baptists) of Mississippi for starting and supporting most of the work. By 1896, there were some 400 Choctaw Baptists out of around 2,000 Choctaws in the state.¹⁶

New roles for women and young people

Prior to the 1870s, the Baptist women of Mississippi assumed a behind-the-scenes role. Although women like Lottie Moon of Virginia went overseas as missionaries, women rarely took a leading role in Baptist life. This began to change with the rise of the women's missionary movement. Baptist women organized the Ladies Missionary Society in Carrollton in 1870, with the encouragement of their pastor, H. F. Sproles. Each member contributed a dime a month. This example spread so rapidly that by the end of 1870, a union of women's mission societies included churches in Winona, Vaiden, Carrollton, Duck Hill, Goodman, West, Mt. Nebo, Kosciusko, and Raymond.¹⁷

It was not until 1875, and only then after some opposition, that the state convention approved what they called "women's work." That year, the convention urged pastors to organize women's mission societies in every church. Among the delegates of the convention in 1875 was a woman registered as Mrs. A. L. Mitchell, reporting from Bethel Baptist Church (Yazoo). She was the first woman accepted as a representative to the convention; by the 1890s, women began to attend as representatives of women's missionary societies. In 1878, the SBC passed a group of resolutions to support Baptist women's mission societies. Mississippi Baptists appointed a committee composed of the wives of prominent Baptist leaders to lead this work. They held their first meeting in 1879 in Grenada during the state convention, with 15 women's societies represented. By 1885, there were 98 women's mission societies in the state. The Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) of the South was organized in 1888, and the Baptist women of Mississippi officially joined the WMU on July 18, 1888, thereby bringing all of the missions societies in the state under the umbrella of the WMU. By the end of the century, there were nearly 200 local churches with WMU groups.¹⁸

In 1887, the Loyalist Movement was started by O. W. Van Osdel, a pastor in Ottawa, Kansas, to encourage the loyalty of Baptist young people to the faith. This led to a meeting in Chicago in 1890, where Northern Baptist leaders laid plans for a national organization of Baptist young people. The Baptist Young People's Union (BYPU) of America was launched in Chicago in July, 1891. In 1895 the SBC endorsed the BYPU, and the MBC gave its stamp of approval in 1896, although a state BYPU was not formally organized until 1899. The BYPU often held large rallies of young people,

as well as weekly meetings in local churches, that generated enthusiasm among Baptist youth for Christ.¹⁹

The beginnings of the Baptist Children's Village

After the closure of the Orphans' Home of Mississippi, L. S. Foster, a pastor from Senatobia, began working to start another orphanage in the mid-1890s, inspired by the challenge of James 1:27 that "pure and undefiled religion" is to care for orphans and widows. He incorporated the orphanage in 1894 and set out to gather support, organizing a board of trustees that included prominent Baptist leaders such as W. T. Lowrey and L. M. Stone, with Foster himself as president of the trustees and superintendent of the home. They secured 112 acres of land near Jackson, and since they had no building on it, they rented a house. On May 12, 1897, Foster opened what he called the Mississippi Baptist Orphanage, with 27 orphans. The purpose of the home was "that as far as possible a home shall be given to every destitute white orphan in Mississippi who may apply, whatever may have been the religious faith of the parents." (The home was opened to children of all races in 1983.) The first residents ranged in age from 10 months to 14 years, and during the first year, nine of the children were adopted by families in Mississippi.²⁰

While the orphanage was run independently of the state convention at first, the trustees invited the Baptists of Mississippi to consider it "their property to be by them controlled and supported." The convention gave them time at the annual meeting and space in the minutes to share about their need. In 1899, the orphanage reported that it had aided 52 orphans, 22 of whom had been adopted, with 30 children remaining in a temporarily rented building. Two cottages were under construction on their land. As the 20th century dawned, the home that would come to be called the Baptist Children's Village was bringing the light of hope to more and more children.²¹

Mississippi Baptists get their own newspaper

Even before the Civil War, Mississippi Baptists had attempted to pub-

lish an official journal, but they were unsuccessful until the 1870s. From 1869 to 1876, J. T. Freeman and M. P. Lowrey edited a page called the "Mississippi Department," which was published in *The Tennessee Baptist*, the newspaper of Landmark Baptist leader J. R. Graves, in Memphis. In July 1875, the General Baptist Association of Southeast Mississippi began *The Southern Baptist*, published in Meridian, with A. Gressett as editor, and in 1876, the committee on publications reported to the state convention "that a paper published at some suitable point in the state is eminently desirable." The convention requested that their president, M. P. Lowrey, head up the project but remain as editor of the "Mississippi Department" until a new paper could be started. Lowrey was frustrated by the recommendation because it came with no funding plan, and he resigned the editorship. In his final editorial of July 22, 1876, he wrote, "We are told we must start a good paper or none at all. ... And yet we were not provided one dollar. ... Let those who voted to get rid of the Mississippi Department and establish a new paper each bring one thousand dollars and lay it at the feet of the Committee."²²

Lowrey's friend, J. B. Gambrell, saved the day. In a letter to *The Tennessee Baptist* in September 1876, he stated the need for more space for Mississippi Baptist writings than was available in *The Tennessee Baptist*, and a few months later, Gambrell was given the job of editor. In February 1877, the *Mississippi Baptist Record* was begun in Clinton with Gambrell as editor and M. Thomas Martin as business manager. The convention report of 1877 referred to the journal as the offspring of the last convention and recommended it to Baptists of the state. While the paper was not under the supervision or direction of the convention, in subsequent years it was referred to as "our own convention paper" and "our own organ." In the following years, the newspaper moved back and forth from Clinton to Jackson and then to Meridian in 1887, when it combined with *The Southern Baptist* and was named the *Southern Baptist Record*. In 1893, Gambrell left the state to become president of Mercer University; he would later serve as president of the SBC from 1917 to 1920.²³

Meanwhile, W. A. Hurt of Winona began publication of a rival newspaper, *The Baptist Layman*, in October 1890. *The Baptist Layman* consisted largely of selections culled from religious newspapers that would be of interest to the laity. Thomas Jefferson Bailey became editor in 1895, and it

grew rapidly and began to publish weekly. To save confusion between the two newspapers, a group of Mississippi Baptist leaders met in Brookhaven in July 1898 and proposed to merge the two. They formed a stock company, the Mississippi Baptist Publishing Company. In August of that year, they bought both papers, and a new paper, *The Baptist Record*, was inaugurated. At first, J. B. Searcy was editor and T. J. Bailey was business manager. After a year, Searcy resigned, and Bailey succeeded him as editor. As the century ended, the newspaper that had begun in 1877 emerged as a stable, reliable publication for Mississippi Baptists.²⁴

Ministerial relief work

Prior to 1881, any relief work for struggling ministers was done by local churches and associations. In 1881, W. H. Hardy recommended in his annual president's address that the state convention organize relief for old ministers in needy circumstances and for widows of preachers who were left without adequate means of support. That year, the convention organized a Board of Sustentation to aid "indigent Baptist ministers and the indigent orphans of Baptist ministers within the bounds of this Convention." The board organized in Meridian in 1882 and put out an appeal for funds in *The Baptist Record*. Board treasurer T. L. Hulbert reported at the next session of the state convention that he had only received \$13.50 and pledges amounting to \$82.²⁵

In 1885, the Board of Sustentation reported that "there has been but little done" by the convention, although some associations were aiding needy ministers, and it recommended that the board "be consolidated with the other denominational enterprises, fostered by this Convention." The report concluded with the stories of ministers in need. Rev. W. H. Edwards of Bethlehem Baptist Church (Choctaw) "has been confined to his room a year with rheumatism. He has a large and almost helpless family." Rev. R. D. Middleton of Hazlehurst "has been pastor thirty years, and is now a cripple and will probably remain such through life. He has a small and poor farm, one son of eighteen with him, and several children in Texas and Louisiana." Middleton received \$41.10 from the Strong River Baptist Association. The board reported on a widow of a pastor in Winona, named



Carte-de-viste of William H. Hardy;
circa 1860, M380 Hardy (William H and
Sallie J), Historical Manuscripts,
The University of Southern Mississippi.

“Mrs. J. Z. Matthews,” saying she “has five daughters and one son who is seven years old. Can get meal and meat this year and owes about \$25. She has no place.” Yazoo Baptist Association gave her \$26.35. Rev. G. W. Mallet of Corinth “was once wealthy and preached the Gospel without compensation, but now, in his old age, is wholly helpless and dependent, with his daughter as nurse.” The state convention delegates collected \$17 for Rev. Mallet.²⁶

The creation of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

Both Gambrell and Hardy could foresee the need for Mississippi Baptists to have a stronger organization of their missionary efforts. Since 1869, a fragmented mission appeal for financial support had come from five separate mission boards; in addition to these, the boards of trustees of Mississippi College and the Orphan’s Home continued to make competing appeals to the churches. Such fragmentation had created a financial crisis for some of the boards; some received more than they needed, while others

did not receive enough help to operate. Each ministry depended on fundraising appeals to churches by their leaders and by professional fundraising specialists. In 1877, the corresponding secretary of the state missions board traveled 1,932 miles and visited 28 churches in three months, yet it was still not enough to make up for the indebtedness of \$2,500. Other Baptist ministries in the state had similar struggles.²⁷

Every ministry existed in a state of financial uncertainty, not because the people were unwilling to give, but because there was no consistent system for giving. Some of the leading Baptists, including Hardy and Gambrell, realized that a systematic method of giving had to replace the spasmodic response to the appeals of a fundraising specialist.

In 1883, Hardy used his presidential address to the state convention to lay out the reasons for a new method for funding ministries. He gave both a practical and a Biblical reason for change. First, as a successful businessman himself, he referred to the need for financial efficiency, saying, "This is a day of progress. With railroads, telegraphs, telephones, and daily newspapers have come many changes in business methods." Second, he referred to scripture, noting "the Bible plan of giving" to set aside a portion each week in proportion to one's income (2 Corinthians 16:2). He added that "the Savior himself" said to "count the cost" before taking on a task (Luke 14:28). For these reasons, he called for all of the state ministries to be put under one financial umbrella: "I believe that the complete unification of Baptists of Mississippi is not only desirable and practicable, but that it is obligatory." He then proposed a new method of funding Baptist ministries in the state, with a financial secretary who oversaw all of the finances of the convention, and "let the Convention fix a minimum sum, which it is desired shall be expended in each department of work during the year, and let this be apportioned."²⁸

The following day, Gambrell seized on the momentum of Hardy's speech, making a motion that "a committee of fifteen be appointed to consider the feasibility of a more perfect organization of the benevolent agencies of the Convention," which was adopted. The committee gave a report that included many of Hardy's suggestions, and added a few additions of their own, such as suggesting that undesignated contributions be divided in the following manner: 50% to foreign missions, 20% to home missions, and 10% to support for aged ministers and orphans of deceased ministers.

This proposal called for dramatic change. Even though a Landmark Baptist like Gambrell supported it, many Baptists feared centralizing too much power in the state convention. After “general discussion,” the proposal was postponed until the next year.²⁹

In 1884, the committee “On More Perfect Organization of Our Work” reported “that they are not prepared to present any definite plan at this session.” Hardy was not content with these delaying tactics, and he used his president’s address in 1884 to reply to fears of centralized power. He said, “But some one may be ready to cry out in trepidation and alarm CENTRALIZATION! As a Baptist this has no terrors for me. It is the veriest bug-bear ... it is impossible that there can be among Baptists any centralization of power outside of the churches.” Still, the issue was delayed.³⁰

In 1885, Hardy once again used his president’s address to press for change, saying, “It is hardly probable that *any* change that might be made would not be an improvement on our present system.” Hardy’s persistent challenges finally broke down the opposition enough to get action from the committee that had been appointed to consider the question. The committee unanimously recommended in its report the appointment of a board of the MBC, to be composed of 15 members, nine of whom would live near the board’s headquarters; that this board should have supervision of all the ministries of the convention with the right to prorate all the undesignated sums collected; that collections should be taken for state missions, home missions, foreign missions, Mississippi College, ministerial education, and “sustentation” (support for aged ministers and orphans of ministers); and that the board should submit an annual report to the convention. After some discussion, the report was tabled, but on the following day, the motion was considered again and adopted, with an amendment to make Jackson the headquarters of the board. The Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) was finally organized, and the fragmented system of financing ministry was on its way out.³¹

These changes made the state convention more efficient, which helped its ministry to grow. The state missions board, the board of sustentation, and others merged into the new board. Gambrell was chosen as the first leader, the “secretary” of the MBCB; he served from 1885 to 1887. He was followed by John T. Christian, from 1887 to 1893, and Abner V. Rowe, who was secretary from 1893 to 1914. Contributions increased, and by the

end of the century, the convention included 53 associations representing 1,260 churches, mostly small rural congregations, and consisting of 90,454 members.³²

The removalist controversy over Mississippi College

This time of improved efficiencies was overshadowed by three major controversies. The first was a controversy surrounding an attempt to transfer Mississippi College from Clinton to a more prominent location, which ultimately favored Meridian. Those in favor of relocating the school were nicknamed “removalists.” The removalist movement began sometime in the mid-1880s—it was first suggested publicly at the state convention in 1885—but the issue came to the forefront in 1891.³³

The trustees of Mississippi College tried to stop the movement by making changes to the college administration. The president, W. S. Webb, had served since 1873, but by 1891 he appeared physically incapable of continuing as the administrator of the college. On August 11, after a closed-door meeting with the faculty, the trustees encouraged Dr. Webb to retire, which he agreed to do, and he was made an emeritus professor. Webb was succeeded by his son-in-law, Robert A. Venable, who left the pastorate of First Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee, to become the college’s president. Two younger professors, R. M. Leavell and S. C. Mitchell, resigned in objection. Historian Z. T. Leavell implied that the changes involved a conflict between the older and younger generations, writing that “the surging of young manhood, with progressive ideas opposed the staid thoughts of wise old age.”³⁴

While it was making administrative changes, Mississippi College was having financial problems. More than half of all Mississippi Baptists’ gifts went to the college in 1891, yet the college operated at a loss. The buildings needed repairs, and the finance committee was behind in paying professors’ salaries. The school reported these deficits to the convention from year to year, but the deficits continued to increase. The trustees urged an increase in the college endowment from \$40,000 to a minimum of \$100,000 to help it compete with rival institutions. This sparked the removalist movement; some leaders contended that the relocation of Mississippi College to a larg-

er city would give it added prestige, thus furnishing an incentive for larger gifts for its endowment. Clinton was still a village of only 354 people in 1900, whereas Meridian had 14,050 citizens, making it the second-largest city in the state after Vicksburg's 14,834.³⁵

At the state convention meeting in 1891, a committee was elected to study other possible locations for Mississippi College. There was widespread interest in transferring the college to a larger city, even among the college's closest friends, as the study committee included two trustees of the college. Former college president Webb presided over the meeting; he was serving as president of the MBC at the time.³⁶

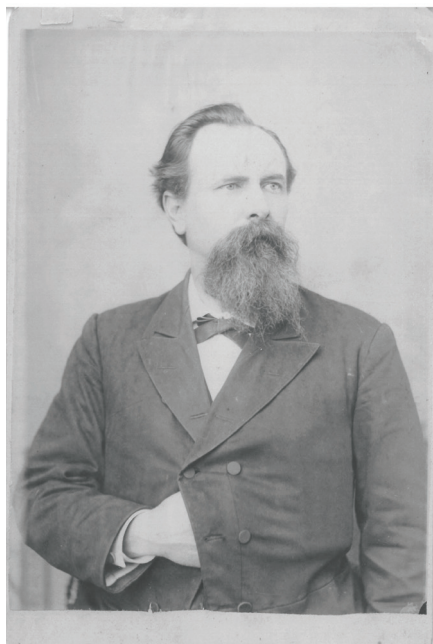
When the state convention met again in 1892, the committee reported an offer from the city of Meridian to donate 20 acres of land and erect a building by October 1893 if the college would relocate there. Immediately after the report, Meridian businessman and former convention president W. H. Hardy proposed that the offer be accepted. However, there was fierce opposition to the proposal. Clinton's Walter Hillman, former president of Hillman College and Mississippi College, delivered a speech against the relocation. Both Hardy and Hillman were respected, influential leaders. Sharp lines were drawn, but those favoring removal were in the majority. Speeches, motions, and counter motions were made on both sides. J. S. Solomon of Meridian raised the offer to 80 acres of land, and the removalists guaranteed \$50,000 from businessmen of Meridian to transfer the college, while the opposition could only offer plans to raise funds to repair the buildings in Clinton. Debate continued until 1:30 a.m., when the exhausted delegates finally voted 96-66 in favor of transferring the college to Meridian, with 54 abstaining.³⁷

While the question was settled by a vote of the convention, it was not settled in the minds of Mississippi Baptists. The state convention of 1892 was "the stormiest of the 19th century." Central Baptist Association, where Clinton was located, was discontented; they were determined to exhaust every resource before giving up the college. The state was deluged with circulars condemning the removal. The debate became so heated that editor of *The Baptist Record* decided to stop printing letters and circulars on the subject. Hardy pointed out that the convention had already voted, and it was a moot issue.³⁸

On January 11, 1893, a lawyer for the Mississippi College trustees

dropped a bombshell. Judge David Shelton presented his opinion to the trustees that the college charter from the legislature fixed the name *and location* of the college at Clinton, and that when the Baptists took control of Mississippi College in 1850, they received it with the understanding that it was chartered to operate in Clinton. Therefore, any relocation of the college would be a breach of the charter and the Baptists would forfeit control back to the town of Clinton. Not everybody agreed with Shelton's legal opinion, but it made them reluctant to implement the transfer. The trustees took no action, and the committee appointed by the state convention to supervise the relocation did nothing. Meridian became impatient by the inaction and gave the Baptists a deadline of March to begin the removal. When nothing happened, Meridian withdrew its bid. As powerful as Hardy was, he could not win the battle.³⁹

After the furious debate in 1892, Mississippi Baptists feared another controversial state convention in 1893. Rumors circulated that a "secret scheme" was to be thrust on the convention. Many feared division. L. M. Stone suggested, in a letter to *The Baptist Record*, "that the Baptists spend time in prayer before the Convention, that the Holy Spirit subdue the passions, mellow the spirit, and make lovely the speech of its people." Gambrell, editor of *The Baptist Record*, made three colorful suggestions to those who would bring those "secret schemes." He proposed that they get sick and stay home, go on a fishing trip, or "Let the brother who impunges [sic] the motive of those who differ with him go to see his mother-in-law while the Convention settles the college question." To everyone's surprise, when the convention met, the issue did not come up, except for a resolution that was adopted without debate: "Further agitation of the removal of Mississippi College is unwise, hurtful to all our denominational interests, and counter to our chartered obligations." The convention elected A. A. Lomax, a removalist, as president; H. F. Sproles, who was neutral on the issue, as secretary; and W. T. Ratliff, an anti-removalist, as treasurer. The 1893 convention came to be nicknamed the "Peace Convention." The financial situation slowly improved at Mississippi College, and, in a conciliatory move in 1899, the property owners of Clinton signed a quit-claim deed releasing the property of the college to the MBC, provided that the college remain in Clinton. Jesse L. Boyd wrote, "The college remained at Clinton and will doubtless remain there for all time."⁴⁰



M.T. Martin.
*Photograph courtesy of the Texas Baptist
Historical Commission.*

The Martinism controversy over theology

Even as the 1893 annual meeting of the state convention played out peacefully, a scuffle was about to erupt in the Mississippi Baptist Association and spread across the state. Boyd wrote, “Its rise was gradual, its force cumulative, its aftermath bitter, and its resultant breach slow in healing.”⁴¹ While it may have been a quibble over words rather than a serious breach of Baptist doctrine, it illustrates how Mississippi Baptists clashed over different views of salvation by the end of the 19th century.

M. Thomas Martin was professor of mathematics at Mississippi College from 1871 to 1880, and he also served as the business manager of *The Baptist Record* from 1877 to 1881. He moved to Texas in 1883, where he had great success as an evangelist for nearly a decade, reporting some 4,000 professions of faith. However, his methods of evangelism drew critics in Texas. According to J. H. Lane, while Martin was still in Texas, “the church in Waco, Texas, of which Dr. B. H. Carroll is pastor, tried Bro. Martin some years ago, and found him way out of line, for which he was deposed from the ministry.” In 1892 Martin returned to Mississippi and became pastor of Galilee Baptist Church, Gloster (Amite). Martin preached the annual ser-

mon at the Mississippi association in 1893. His sermon had such an effect on those present that the clerk entered in the Minutes, “Immediately after the sermon, forty persons came forward and said that they *had peace with God, and full assurance for the first time.*” The following year, Mississippi association reported on Martin’s mission work in reviving four churches, during which he baptized 19 people and another 60 in his own pastorate. Soon, Mississippi Baptists echoed the Texas critics that he was “way out of line,” not because he baptized so many, but because so many were “rebaptisms.”⁴²

The crux of the controversy was Martin’s emphasis on “full assurance,” which often led people who had previously professed faith and been baptized to question their salvation and seek baptism again. In 1895, the Mississippi association called Martin’s teachings “heresy” and censured Martin and Galilee for practicing rebaptism “to an unlimited extent, unwarranted by Scriptures.” When the association met again in 1896, resolutions were presented against Galilee for not taking action against their pastor, but other representatives said they had no authority to meddle in matters of local church autonomy. As a compromise, the association passed a resolution requesting that *The Baptist Record* publish articles by Martin explaining his views alongside articles by the association opposing those views, “that our denomination may be ... enabled to judge whether his teachings be orthodox or not.” The editor of *The Baptist Record* honored the request, and Martin’s views appeared in the paper the following year. The association enlisted R. A. Venable to write against him, but Venable declined to do so. Martin also published a pamphlet entitled *The Doctrinal Views of M. T. Martin*. When these two publications appeared, what had been little more than a dust devil of controversy in one association developed into a hurricane encompassing the entire state.⁴³

Most of Martin’s teachings on salvation were common among Baptists. Even his opponent, J. H. Lane, admitted, “Some of Bro. Martin’s doctrine is sound.” Martin taught that the Holy Spirit causes people to be aware that they are lost, and the Spirit enables people to repent and believe in Christ. He taught that people are saved by grace alone, through faith rather than works, and when people are saved, they should be baptized as an act of Christian obedience. Martin said that salvation does not depend on one’s feelings and that children of God have no reason to question their assur-

ance of salvation.

These teachings were not controversial. What was controversial was what Lane called “doctrine that is not Baptist,” and what T. C. Schilling said “is not in accord with Baptists.” Martin said if a man doubted his Christian experience, he was never a true believer.

He considered such doubt to be evidence that one’s spiritual experience was not genuine, and the person needed to be baptized again. “If you have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ,” Martin said, “you will be the first one to know it, and the last one to give it up.” He frequently said, “We do wrong to comfort those who doubt their salvation, because we seek to comfort those whom the Lord has not comforted.” Therefore, Martin called for people who questioned their salvation to receive baptism regardless of whether they had been baptized before. “I believe in real believer’s baptism, and I do not believe that one is a believer until he has discarded all self-righteousness, and has looked to Christ as his only hope forever. ... I believe that every case of re-baptism should stand on its own merits, and be left with the pastor and the church.”⁴⁴

The 1897 session of the Mississippi Baptist Association took further action against Martinism. They withdrew fellowship from Zion Hill Baptist Church (Amite) for endorsing Martin and urged Baptists not “to recognize him as a Baptist minister.” The association urged churches under the influence of Martinism to return to the “old faith of Baptists,” and if they did not, they would forfeit membership. When the state convention met in 1897, some wanted to leave the issue alone, but others forced it. The convention voted to appoint a committee to report “upon the subject of ‘Martinism.’” Following their report, the convention adopted a resolution of censure by a vote of 101-16, saying, “Resolved, That this Convention does not endorse, but condemns, the doctrinal views of Prof. M. T. Martin.” While a strong majority condemned Martinism, a significant minority of Baptists in the state disagreed. From 1895 to 1900, the Mississippi association declined from 31 to 22 churches and from 3,042 to 2,208 members. In 1905, the state convention adopted a resolution expressing regret for the censure of Martin in 1897.⁴⁵

Earl Kelly observed two interesting doctrinal facts that the controversy over Martinism revealed about Mississippi Baptists during this period: “First, the Augustinian conception of grace was held by the majority of

Mississippi Baptists; and second, Arminianism was beginning to make serious inroads into the previously Calvinistic theology of these Baptists.” It is significant that Mississippi association referred to Martinism as a rejection of “the old faith of Baptists” and that when J. R. Sample defended Martin, Lane pointed out that Sample was formerly a Methodist.⁴⁶

The Whitsitt controversy over church history

The late 1800s were a time of increasing interest among Baptists in their history, as illustrated by the organization of the Mississippi Baptist Historical Society.⁴⁷ But when Dr. William Whitsitt published research in church history that conflicted with Landmarkism, he came under fire. Whitsitt was the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and a professor of church history. In 1896, Whitsitt published *A Question in Baptist History* and an article in *Johnson’s Universal Cyclopedia*, which suggested that Baptists did not practice immersion until 1641 in Newport, Rhode Island. In other words, he claimed that the first Baptists practiced believer’s baptism by sprinkling or pouring and only adopted baptism by immersion in 1641. This was a direct challenge to Landmarkism, which taught that since the beginning of the Christian church, there have always been churches that believed and practiced what today’s Baptists believe and practice. Other American Baptist historians confirmed Whitsitt’s research, including A. H. Newman and Henry C. Vedder, but that didn’t matter to Landmark Baptists—they considered it heresy.⁴⁸

Baptists all over America reacted to Whitsitt’s research. Many of the Landmark persuasion simply didn’t want to hear it, like T. T. Eaton, editor of the *Western Recorder*, the Baptist newspaper in Kentucky, who wrote, “We believe—past all conviction to the contrary—that the Baptists adopted immersion in the year 30, and have been immersing ever since.” Others challenged Whitsitt’s scholarship, including Landmark historian and Kentucky pastor John T. Christian, who had been secretary of the MBCB from 1887 to 1893 and later became pastor of First Baptist Church, Hattiesburg (Forrest), 1913–1919. Christian said that Whitsitt had used questionable sources.⁴⁹

In 1897, the MBC snubbed Whitsitt, who was present at the meeting,

passing a resolution which said he “has been so unfortunate in the presentation of his views as to alienate a large number of Southern Baptists, who were formerly friends and supporters of the Seminary.” The resolution indirectly implied that no financial support should be given to the seminary until Whitsitt left, saying they pledged their support “when the Trustees shall have taken such action as shall again gain for it the sympathy of Southern Baptists.” Whitsitt was not allowed to speak or receive an offering. A motion was made to allow him to “be heard in the interest of the Seminary, provided that no public collection be taken for the same,” but the motion was tabled.⁵⁰

The state convention’s comment about Baptists who were “formerly friends” of Whitsitt was painfully true; ironically, Whitsitt was a lifelong friend of J. R. Graves, the founder of Landmarkism. With so many turned against him, Whitsitt resigned in July 1898. The MBC, which met the same month Whitsitt resigned, responded to the news with a resolution: “Resolved, That we have learned with much satisfaction of the resignation of Dr. W.H. Whitsitt as President and Professor in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and ... we deem this an opportune time to reaffirm our loyalty to the Seminary and pledge to it our most hearty support.”⁵¹

The Whitsitt controversy revealed the continued influence of Landmarkism and how Southern Baptists were suspicious of education. Earl Kelly noted that condemning Whitsitt was a mistake “of assuming the validity of historical facts could be voted upon in spite of authoritative evidence to the contrary.”⁵²

S. W. Sibly put these controversies in perspective in a column that appeared in *The Baptist Record* in 1896: “Some Baptists and some Baptist churches seem to think that they are not Baptist unless they are in a church brawl. Brethren, for the Lord’s sake, quit it. There’s no scripture for it, and you know that Baptists are a mighty people for demanding a ‘thus saith the Lord’ for everything.”⁵³

Chapter 9

The Great Advances

1900–1929

The first decades of the 20th century were a period of remarkable advancement. In the United States, the bitter controversies of the Civil War period gave way to a new feeling of nationalism, particularly through military victories in the Spanish-American War and the First World War. Historian Thomas S. Kidd said that it was a time full of optimism that “America’s ills could be solved by hard work, creative planning, and moral zeal.”¹ Even as America was developing a national consciousness, Southern Baptists were developing a denominational consciousness. Many of the organizations and programs that became distinctive to Southern Baptists developed in the first decades of the 20th century, and much of the leadership and involvement came from Mississippi.²

The United States became an economic powerhouse during this period. The automobile and the radio revolutionized transportation and communication. However, economic prosperity was checked on several occasions by recessions and panics. The readjustment of the economy after World War I created a sharp recession that hit farmers especially hard in the early 1920s. The economy rebounded during the Roaring Twenties, but in 1929, the stock market crash led to the Great Depression, which continued for a decade.³

Political reform was so pervasive that the period is often called the Pro-

gressive Era. Four new constitutional amendments were adopted in the years from 1913 to 1920, allowing income tax (seen as a tax on the rich), the popular election of U. S. senators (instead of by state legislatures), the prohibition of the sale of alcohol, and women gaining the right to vote. Southern Baptists displayed the same enthusiasm and optimism that was prevalent in the nation. Baptists were at the forefront of the crusade to ban alcohol. A Committee on Temperance reported in 1910, "As the North led the nation against slavery, the South should lead the nation against liquor."⁴

Despite the success of Prohibition, American culture began a liberalization of moral practices. Women celebrated the freedom to vote. Some expressed themselves as flappers who wore shorter skirts, shorter hair, smoked, and sought divorce more often. The Roaring Twenties were characterized by a consumer culture with a growing appetite for sports and jazz music that they could listen to on the radio and watch in movies. Even Prohibition caused a backlash which eventually led to its repeal in 1933. American culture clashed like resounding cymbals during the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925, as people listened to a live radio broadcast of a Tennessee teacher put on trial for teaching evolution; some ridiculed conservative Christians, while others ridiculed evolutionary theory.⁵

As Mississippi Baptists entered the 20th century, most churches were still rural and held worship services only once a month. In 17 associations, not a single Baptist church had worship more often than monthly. As of 1897, only 29 Mississippi Baptist churches met every Sunday, all of them located in towns.⁶

At the turn of the century, new congregations were being planted across the state, in rural areas like D'Lo in Simpson County as well as towns like Meridian, Jackson, and Columbus. Church buildings were being erected in Biloxi, Gulfport, Nicholson, Lumberton, Collins, Laurel, Jackson, Yazoo City, Ruleville, Tunica, Belzoni, Merigold, and Clarksdale. In 1901, Laurel was described as "the most rapidly growing town in Mississippi," yet Baptists struggled with a small church that only met once a month. However, in 1902, the Laurel Baptist Church, Laurel (Jones), reported that "the Holy Spirit was present in great power, and 184 were added to the church." McHenry Baptist Church, McHenry (Stone), had "a gracious revival" that resulted in 57 new members, 11 by baptism.⁷

Mississippi Baptists grew faster than the rest of the Southern Baptist

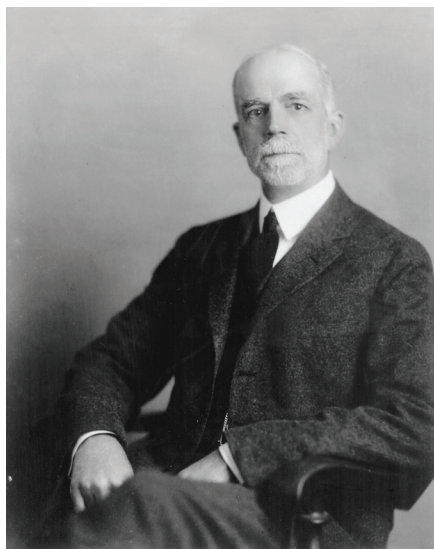
Convention (SBC) during this time. At the dawn of the century, Southern Baptists reported 3,184,312 members, and in 1929 they reported 3,770,645 members. In contrast, in 1900, the Mississippi Baptist Convention (MBC) reported 100,226 members, and in 1929 they reported 225,941 members.⁸ During this time, Mississippi also produced numerous influential leaders in the SBC.

Southern Baptist leaders from Mississippi

In the early 20th century, Southern Baptist leaders with Mississippi ties included Landrum P. Leavell, J. B. Gambrell, E. Y. Mullins, B. D. Gray, Arthur Flake, J. B. Lawrence, and R. B. Gunter. Gambrell was elected president of the SBC in 1917 and served for four years, during which time Southern Baptists launched the 75 Million Campaign to fund its causes.

Mullins, born in Franklin County, was president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1899 to 1928 and president of the SBC from 1921 to 1924; he was chairman of the committee that recommended the very first doctrinal statement of Southern Baptists, the Baptist Faith and Message, in 1925.⁹

Gray, corresponding secretary of the Home Mission Board of the SBC from 1903 to 1928, had deep Mississippi roots. Gray was born in Waynesboro and graduated from Mississippi College. He was pastor of several churches in Mississippi, including First Baptist Church, Clinton (Hinds), and First Baptist Church, Hazlehurst (Copiah). Later, when Gray became leader of the Home Mission Board, he received enthusiastic support from Mississippi. The state convention said, "It is with special delight that we hail the coming of Dr. B. D. Gray, one of Mississippi's favorite sons, to the office of Corresponding Secretary." Each year a report on home missions was given at the convention, and Mississippi Baptists were urged to raise their share to support the Home Mission Board. Gray was a guest at the 1908 MBC, and "he was given due recognition." Sadly, the Home Mission Board was rocked by scandal in August 1928 when it was discovered that the treasurer embezzled just under a million dollars. Gray knew that new leadership was needed, so he stepped down and was replaced by another Mississippian, J. B. Lawrence.¹⁰



EY Mullins.

Photo courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, James P. Boyce Centennial Library, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

Arthur Flake was born in Texas but moved to Winona, Mississippi, in 1895, when he married Lena Nelson. A traveling salesman and department store manager, Flake was a gifted organizer who changed the face of Sunday school in the SBC. In 1895 he organized the first Baptist Young People's Union (BYPU) in Mississippi at his church in Winona. He also served as a volunteer Sunday school superintendent in his church, and he was so successful that he was elected in 1909 as a field worker with the Sunday School Board of the SBC. In 1920, he was placed in charge of standardizing how Southern Baptists conducted Sunday school. He developed his famous "Flake's Formula" for growing a Sunday school: Discover the possibilities, enlarge the organization, provide a place, train the workers, and visit the prospects. Baptist historians point to God's work through Flake as a major reason that Southern Baptists had more growth through Sunday school than other denominations.¹¹

Landrum P. Leavell was born near Cherry Creek in 1874. He was the first Sunday school secretary of the MBC, and in 1903 he began work as a field secretary for the Baptist Sunday School Board, traveling extensively from his base in Oxford to promote efficiency in Sunday schools. 1907, the board gave him the job of promoting BYPUs in churches. In 1918, the BSSB created a separate BYPU department, the forerunner of the Baptist Training Union, and made Leavell its head.¹²



AV Rowe.
*Photo courtesy of the Mississippi College
Archives.*

A. V. Rowe, '72

Three men served in the leadership role called “secretary” or “corresponding secretary” of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) during the early 20th century: A. V. Rowe (1893–1914), J. B. Lawrence (1914–21), and R. B. Gunter (1922–39). Each of these men led Mississippi Baptists during times of numerical and organizational growth, and Lawrence and Gunter were also prominent in the SBC.

Mississippi Baptists under A. V. Rowe, 1893–1914

Abner Vernon Rowe, secretary of the convention board for 21 years, led Mississippi Baptists during a time of rapid growth in the denomination. During the years from 1900 to 1910, Southern Baptists in the state increased from 100,406 to 146,510, a growth of 46%. To handle this growth, several organizational changes were made. Prior to 1901, delegates were elected to the state convention from associations, churches, and Baptist benevolent organizations. In 1900, an amendment to the constitution was proposed to change how representatives were elected; the amendment was defeated in 1901 but adopted in 1902. This amendment changed the term

for representatives to the state convention from “delegates” to “messengers,” and it only allowed associations and local churches to elect messengers, preventing other Baptist organizations from sending representatives. This was a move away from the society method of representation (based on financial support) and a move closer to the associational method of representation (based on geography and the local church). This change was pleasing to Baptists with Landmark views, as it put more emphasis on the local church, although associations could still elect messengers. The term “messenger” instead of “delegate” was a reminder that the representative was free to vote as he or she felt led by God, rather than being “delegated” or instructed on how to vote by the church.¹³

One of the key areas of growth for Mississippi Baptists during this period was in Sunday schools. In 1900, only about a third of the Baptist churches in Mississippi had a Sunday school, as it was seen as a Bible teaching ministry only for children. The state convention promoted Sunday school work among all ages, and First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), was the first to experiment with the innovation of a Sunday school class for young men, which met with such success that they organized another class for young women, which was also successful. In 1903, the state convention said, “We commend the idea to our brethren.” Soon, the idea of adult Sunday school caught on across the state, aided by an abundance of printed material available at modest cost from the Baptist Sunday School Board. The pioneering organizational work that Flake started in Mississippi spread through the SBC. James Edward (J. E.) Byrd became field secretary for Sunday school work in 1903, a ministry he continued for 34 years. “Our aim is a graded Sunday School in every church,” said Byrd. He promoted teacher training, better Sunday school facilities, and Vacation Bible Schools. By 1923, more than half of the churches in the state had Sunday schools, and many included adults.¹⁴

Another area of growth for Mississippi Baptists early in this period was in organizations that promoted missions. The Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU) took the lead in financial support for missions. Mrs. W. R. Woods served in a volunteer role as Mississippi WMU secretary from 1899 to 1911. In 1903, the WMU called for a special day to be designated as State Missions Day to take a special offering for Mississippi missions. In 1909, the WMU reported “special offerings at Christmas for China” and the or-

ganization of additional age groups to support missions: a young women's organization, the Young Woman's Auxiliary (YWA); and organizations for children to learn missions, called Sunbeams for small children and Royal Ambassadors (RAs) for boys. When poor health forced Woods to resign as secretary in 1911, the WMU presented resolutions that the state convention board find a way to keep her. Instead, the board chose Margaret McRae Lackey as her successor, and Lackey was named the first paid corresponding secretary of the WMU in April 1912, at a salary of \$50 a month. A single woman with a single focus on missions, she started this new job at age 54 and continued to faithfully serve until 1930, when she was 72.¹⁵

Men took longer than women to organize in support of missions, but an interdenominational Laymen's Missionary Movement began in 1906, and by 1910 the movement was being promoted in Mississippi by the limitless activity of J. L. Johnson. That year he traveled 3,563 miles and spoke 57 times in Mississippi Baptist churches, encouraging men to personally support missions giving and mission education.¹⁶

More churches began to use the "evangelistic singer" during this period. I. E. Reynolds was the best-known evangelistic singer in the early 1900s in Mississippi. He came under the influence of D. L. Moody and Ira Sankey in 1894 in his home state of Alabama. After attending Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Reynolds came to Mississippi in 1905. For the next 10 years, he crisscrossed the state, leading revival meetings, singing in churches, and developing relationships that would aid the development of church music.¹⁷

Under the leadership of L. S. Foster, the Mississippi Baptist Orphanage grew to 48 children by 1901, and two years later housed 82 children—but it also had much debt. The General Association of Regular Baptists cooperated in the work, and they were invited to elect three trustees in 1903. Foster resigned as superintendent in 1903, and J. R. Carter began a 24-year tenure as superintendent on September 1, 1903.¹⁸

Beginning in 1909, the state convention changed its annual meeting date from July to November. In 1911, the convention adopted resolutions reorganizing the MBCB and giving it increased authority. MBCB membership increased to 27, to be selected from different geographical areas of Mississippi. It was authorized to elect and pay its officers and to receive and distribute funds; in other words, to "have the oversight of all the benevo-

lent work of the Convention.”¹⁹

In 1907, Baptists in Arkansas, Tennessee, and Mississippi agreed to jointly sponsor a Baptist hospital in Memphis named the Tri-State Baptist Sanitorium. The recommendation specifically said that the Baptist hospital in Memphis “shall not be understood as finally taking the place of a Mississippi sanitorium, but rather as preparing the way for it.” The dream of a Baptist hospital in Mississippi was fulfilled just three years later in 1910, as Drs. John F. Hunter and Harley P. Shands offered a property with an eight-room building to the convention, and their offer was accepted. In 1911 the convention heard a report that the Jackson hospital had treated 160 patients, and the convention agreed to name the institution Mississippi Baptist Hospital and to appoint trustees, who set out to raise \$50,000 for its support.²⁰

The state convention’s newspaper, *The Baptist Record*, struggled to increase circulation, despite the strenuous efforts of editor T. J. Bailey. In 1912, Plautus Iberus Lipsey and J. C. Parker purchased *The Baptist Record*. Lipsey became editor, and Parker was business manager. Lipsey continued as editor for nearly 30 years.²¹

Mississippi Baptists under J. B. Lawrence, 1914-1921

On January 1, 1914, A. V. Rowe was succeeded by John Benjamin Lawrence as corresponding secretary of the MBCB; he served until 1922. Born in Rankin County, Lawrence was young and energetic, yet he already had experience as a pastor in Tennessee and Louisiana and as the leader of the Louisiana Baptist Convention. He led the state convention board to make important financial and organizational changes, called the Five-Year Program, which was adopted in 1916. Various agencies were in debt, and Lawrence wanted to clear the debt without hurting the ministries. “In our effort to clear all of our institutions of debt we MUST NOT CEASE TO GO FORWARD,” reported the board in 1916. In an allusion to World War I, the report compared ministry to a spiritual battle, saying, “The word HALT must never be heard in the camp of our soldiers until Jesus shall say: IT IS ENOUGH, COME UP HITHER.” To better manage spending and debt, the convention board adopted an annual budget beginning in 1916.



JB Lawrence.
*Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Baptist
Historical Commission.*

In 1918, the budget apportioned ministry on a percentage basis, with 64% going to state, home, and foreign missions, and 36% going to other ministries within the state. Churches were given a suggested quota to donate, and the board reported that “almost with one accord the churches in the state have accepted this apportionment.”²²

The Five-Year Program also reorganized the convention board’s representation to consist of one board member from each association, serving in staggered three-year terms, so that one-third rotated off each year. At the time, there were 45 associations, so the size of the board increased to 45 members, with 15 rotating off each year. In 1918, the board purchased *The Baptist Record* (and its bookstore), putting the newspaper under its direct supervision. On November 1, 1919, the board purchased a three-story brick building for office space on the corner of Capitol and North President streets in Jackson, to be known as the Denominational Headquarters Building. By renting some of the space, it was anticipated that the purchase would “practically pay for itself.”²³

Circulation of *The Baptist Record* increased under Lipsey’s editorship and the ownership of the convention board. This was a good business move, as the profits from the newspaper and the bookstore nearly paid for the \$8,800 purchase price in the first year. In 1920, the convention board began promoting the idea that each church put *The Baptist Record* in its

budget and send it to every family in each congregation. This plan was so successful that the paper eventually had one of the largest circulations of any publication in the state.²⁴

The Woman's Missionary Union of Mississippi had become so active that by 1917, the women did not have time to hold their meeting jointly with the annual state convention, so they voted to meet separately in June. Under Margaret Lackey's leadership, the State Mission Week of Prayer was inaugurated during the month of September. In 1938, the State Mission Offering would be named in her honor.²⁵

The outbreak of World War I put so many demands on men that the Laymen's Missionary Movement declined in influence. The 1916 state convention reported the cancellation of some of the Laymen's Missionary Movement meetings and the scaling back of their activities. The men's mission organization would later be renewed under the name Baptist Brotherhood.²⁶

The end of World War I was a time of great vision in America. President Woodrow Wilson called for a League of Nations, and Baptists called upon each other for a cooperative effort to expand their ministry. In 1919, J. B. Lawrence and the MBCB wholeheartedly supported a new fundraising campaign among Southern Baptists. The 75 Million Campaign set a goal to raise \$75 million in five years to pay off debts of Baptist agencies and put them on a secure financial footing. It was the first nationwide fundraising effort of Southern Baptists. Mississippi's goal was \$3.5 million, which would go to Southern Baptist foreign and home missions, as well as ministry in Mississippi, including state missions, colleges, ministerial relief, the orphanage, and hospitals. Lawrence challenged Mississippi Baptists to take this bold step, saying, "Every energy and every force of Mississippi Baptists must be harnessed and directed toward the accomplishment of this supreme undertaking. ... The men and women of this age face a new era in denominational life; they are pioneers of a new period of denominational growth and development. Will they be as faithful in their days as their fathers were in theirs? We believe they will."²⁷

The 75 Million Campaign involved church members and churches making five-year pledges by "victory week," the first week of December, 1919. Mississippi Baptists enthusiastically made pledges above their \$3.5 million goal, pledging over \$4.2 million, and actual donations in the first year were \$862,196, on track to reach the five-year goal. Churches across the state,

small and large, made generous pledges. *The Clarion Ledger*, Jackson's leading newspaper, declared in a headline on December 2, 1919, "Baptists far exceed Mississippi quota."²⁸

The enthusiasm generated by the successful start of the 75 Million Campaign was almost immediately dampened by a severe financial recession that spread throughout the nation. This recession of the early 1920s was especially hard on farmers, many of whom were Southern Baptists. Cotton acreage in Mississippi declined, due in part to the boll weevil and the decline in prices for cotton and other farm products. At the same time, timber resources began to diminish as Mississippi's vast forests were not being replenished, and sawmill businesses declined.²⁹

The recession forced the cancellation of many pledges to the 75 Million Campaign. Nationally, Southern Baptists only raised \$58,591,713. Likewise, Mississippi Baptists fell short of their \$3.5 million goal, contributing \$2,475,600 by 1924. In Mississippi, contributions to the 75 Million Campaign decreased dramatically in 1921–1922 and never recovered. As early as 1920, before Mississippi Baptists were aware that contributions were falling short, J. B. Lawrence considered giving up his work as secretary to take another position; the convention board, though, passed a resolution in 1920 pleading with him to stay in his leadership position, saying they "feel that such action on his part would be a distinct calamity at this time." Lawrence accepted the presidency of Oklahoma Baptist University in 1922, and R. B. Gunter inherited the financial problems left behind.³⁰

Ironically, although he left Mississippi, Lawrence would have to deal with even more difficult financial problems in 1928. That year, Clinton S. Carnes, treasurer of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, embezzled just under a million dollars. The bond proceeds and Carnes' assets restored about a third of the loss, but the remainder put the Home Mission Board in danger of bankruptcy. The Southern Baptist Executive Committee took two actions that saved the Home Mission Board. First, they hurriedly appealed to local churches for a special offering on November 11, 1928, called Baptist Honor Day. This offering collected \$400,000, enough to keep the mission board from defaulting. Second, they persuaded Lawrence to leave Oklahoma and accept the post as the new secretary of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board (HMB), replacing B. D. Gray, who had stepped down. Lawrence led the HMB through a slow recovery for the next 25 years.³¹



RB Gunter.
*Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Baptist
Historical Commission.*

Mississippi Baptists under R. B. Gunter, 1921–1929

Richard Baker Gunter began functioning as corresponding secretary of the MBCB at the meeting on November 15–17, 1921, although his duties did not officially begin until January 1, 1922. He distinguished himself in several ways before becoming convention board secretary; he served numerous Mississippi churches as pastor, and, in 1915, he led the First Baptist Church, Louisville (Winston), to be the first church in Mississippi to use a percentage division of gifts. He was the Mississippi publicity director for the 75 Million Campaign from 1919 to 1924. As corresponding secretary, Gunter led the state convention board until February 1, 1939. (His leadership during the Great Depression is covered in the Chapter 11.) His wise and sacrificial leadership would help both Mississippi Baptists and Southern Baptists to survive some of the most difficult times in their history.³²

Gunter was directly involved in a long-term financial solution for all Southern Baptists. The 75 Million Campaign had been designed to pay off the debt of Baptist agencies, but because agencies planned their budgets on the pledges instead of the actual receipts, they were still in debt. In 1924, Gunter was placed on the Forward Program Committee to recommend a

better way. The next year, this committee recommended the adoption of what they called the “Co-Operative Program.” The Cooperative Program was an agreement between the state conventions and the SBC to receive funds at the state level and then forward an agreed-upon percentage of those funds to support Southern Baptist causes. This plan emphasized systematic giving rather than huge financial campaigns. All Southern Baptists were encouraged to practice weekly tithing to their local churches, and pastors could promote all the ministries of the denomination at once by leading their churches to budget a percentage to the Cooperative Program rather than have competing fundraising agents appealing for support. Ministries received funds based on need instead of based on which had the best fundraiser.³³

R. B. Gunter introduced the Cooperative Program to the 1925 MBC, saying, “It is very attractive.” The following year, he reported on the success of the Cooperative Program, saying, “There is a growing desire on the part of our people throughout the State to do our mission, education and benevolent work on a cooperative basis. There is a large increase in budgeting churches. . . . This is a sane method for carrying on our work. Every cause is helped every month.” The MBC’s budget in 1925 allocated 58.5% of funds to stay within the state, while 41.5% went outside it to Southern Baptist causes. (In 1927, this was adjusted to 55% in-state and 45% to Southern Baptist causes.) Although historians consider this a watershed moment in Southern Baptist history, the Cooperative Program gained little attention at the time, as it was overshadowed that same year by the Scopes Monkey Trial debate and the resulting adoption of a confession of faith.³⁴

After 24 years as superintendent of the Mississippi Baptist Orphanage, J. R. Carter resigned in 1927. The new superintendent, B. E. Massey, took the reins the same year. He immediately proposed a change in admission policy, that children “must be turned over to us by the courts.” This was to prevent the common practice of “worthless fathers and mothers” who voluntarily left their small children at the orphanage without granting legal custody. When these children were old enough to work, their parents were said to “take them out and make newsboys and servants out of practically every one of them.”³⁵

During the Gunter years, Margaret Lackey continued to lead the Mississippi Woman’s Missionary Union. She published several mission study

books for the SBC, including *Laborers Together* (1921), *A Decade of W.M.U. Service* (1923), and *From Strength to Strength* (1923). In 1926 she published a book of poems, *Mistletoe and Moss*. One of her poems that focused on the “clear call to larger service” ended with this stanza:

*From heaven born visions,
Glorious thrill filled hours;
Ah, memory folds away such moments
Like pressed flowers!*³⁶

Growth of Mississippi College

The only educational institution that Mississippi Baptists owned at the beginning of the 20th century was Mississippi College. Its president, William Tyndale (W. T.) Lowrey, served from 1898 to 1911. Under Lowrey’s leadership, Mississippi College increased its financial support, increased enrollment, and added several buildings. He was successful in obtaining large financial gifts from individuals and foundations, including \$20,000 from the family of Captain Z. D. Jennings of Water Valley, which was used to construct Jennings Hall, the first dormitory on campus. The American Baptist Education Society offered matching funds to the school in 1901, but since that society was funded by John D. Rockefeller, who some people felt had questionable morality, they felt the money was tainted. Lowrey quipped that the only problem with the money was that “it t’aint enough.”³⁷ Under Lowrey’s leadership, in 1902, enrollment reached 300 for the first time in school history, and it continued to grow, reaching 399 in 1910. Although the college was only for male students at the time, an exception was made for Anna Ward Aven, the daughter of a faculty member; she earned a bachelor’s degree in 1905. Her participation in the college led the faculty to recommend to the trustees that the school officially become coeducational, but the idea was rejected. They did allow students to have a baseball team in 1904; to begin publication of an annual, called *L’Allegro*, in 1907 with pictures of students and activities; a football team in 1907; and a concert band in 1910. At the recommendation of an architect, workers removed the bell and belfry from the Old Chapel in 1910, as the belfry detracted from the classic Grecian lines of the building.³⁸

In 1911, Lowrey was succeeded by J. W. Provine as president of Mississippi College. This was Provine's second term as the college's president, having previously served from 1895 to 1889. Provine served from 1911 to 1932, and during that time numerous buildings were added to the campus, including a dormitory for men, Ratliff Hall, in 1914; a library, Lowrey Hall, in 1917; science halls; and a gymnasium. By 1929, Mississippi College had grown to an enrollment of 529.³⁹

Beginnings of Mississippi Woman's College

Although Mississippi College was the only school owned by Baptists at the beginning of the century, the state convention listed other privately owned Baptist-run schools as "our schools" in the 1900 Minutes, including Blue Mountain Female College in Blue Mountain and Hillman Female College in Clinton. This interest in additional schools led the state convention to create the Mississippi Baptist Education Commission in 1911 to plan, set policies, and oversee cooperation among Baptist schools in Mississippi. Mississippi Baptists were ready to own a college for women, and the opportunity fell into their lap in Hattiesburg.⁴⁰

A group of New Orleans businessmen founded South Mississippi College in Poplarville in 1906 and immediately moved it to land in the south part of Hattiesburg. Under the leadership of William I. Thames, it quickly grew, but tragedy struck. On the night of February 28, 1910, a devastating fire destroyed the main building, eliminating classrooms, the library, and the auditorium. The school was forced to close. In 1911, W. S. F. Tatum, a wealthy lumberman and Methodist layman, bought the 10 acres and remaining two buildings. Tatum offered the property to the state of Mississippi for a teacher's college, then called a "normal college," but the state rejected the site. He tried his fellow Methodists next, but they chose not to build another college since they already had Millsaps College in Jackson. He then offered it as a gift to the four Baptist churches in Hattiesburg. Those churches accepted the offer and formed a corporation, and the trustees hired W. W. Rivers from Arkansas as president. Rivers secured a faculty, recruited students, and opened the school in September 1911 under a new name, Mississippi Woman's College. They offered the debt-free college to

the MBC, and the state convention accepted it on November 23, 1911.⁴¹

John L. Johnson, Jr., served as president of Mississippi Woman's College from 1912-21. During his tenure, an administration building, Tatum Court, was completed in 1914, and brick dormitories, Ross and Johnson halls, were added, as well as an infirmary and a model home to be used as a laboratory for domestic science classes. Enjoying rapid growth in enrollment, the campus expanded to 40 acres, and in 1926 it gained accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. By 1929, the college had 500 students. In 1954, it became coed and changed its name to William Carey College.⁴²

Beginnings of Clarke Memorial College

Clarke Memorial College was established as a junior college in 1907 in Newton by the General Association of Regular Baptists (GARB). It was named for Nathan Lytle Clarke, the long-time president of the association, and opened on September 22, 1908, with 104 students. Clarke had serious financial problems, so the GARB offered the school to the MBC in 1913. The Mississippi Baptist Education Commission agreed to accept the school if certain conditions were met, including the reduction of the debt from \$33,000 to \$15,000. On March 17, 1914, the commission was notified that all conditions had been met, as "eight men got under the load and met the conditions laid down by the commission," and Clarke Memorial College came under the auspices of the MBC. Under the leadership of its president, W. T. Lowrey, Clarke only had 139 students by 1929, as the school faced competition from a public junior college that opened 10 miles away in Decatur and another junior college 50 miles away in Scooba. This competition for students and the onset of the Great Depression only aggravated the financial struggles of the college.⁴³

The state convention acquires Blue Mountain College

Baptist leader M. P. Lowrey opened Blue Mountain College in north Mississippi in 1873. It flourished for 46 years as a college for women. Al-

though owned and operated by the Lowrey and Berry families, who also had acquired Hillman College in 1905, it maintained a friendly relationship with the MBC and was regularly listed as one of “our” schools by the state convention. The school boasted that two-thirds of female foreign missionaries from Mississippi were graduates of Blue Mountain. It seemed natural, therefore, to make the connection official and transfer the school to the ownership of the state convention. The previous policy of the convention was to receive colleges debt-free, so in 1918, A. E. Jennings offered to donate \$100,000 to Blue Mountain College to facilitate the transfer of the college, free of all debt. At the state convention in 1919, Blue Mountain College was presented to the MBC as a gift from the Lowrey and Berry families, with special recognition of the Jennings and Hearn families; S. L. Hearn had donated a brick building to the college in 1903. After making some corrections in the title to the 33 acres of land, the deed officially transferred on May 3, 1920.⁴⁴

The years 1928 and 1929 were traumatic for the students at Blue Mountain College. On December 26, 1928, a fire that originated off campus swept through the campus, destroying five buildings, including a dormitory that housed 50 students. Since the students were away on Christmas vacation, nobody was hurt, and all their trunks were rescued. Lawrence T. Lowrey, president of the college, said, “Happily, the fire destroyed only the oldest, worst houses on the campus: all frame buildings.” The blessing in disguise was that with the old buildings gone, passersby on the highway and railroad had a more attractive view of the campus, as they could see the newer brick buildings instead. Another scare came when a veranda collapsed on October 14, 1929. More than 100 girls were standing on it at the time, but despite several severe injuries, no one was killed, and most injured students returned to school within a few weeks.⁴⁵

Mississippi Baptists debate evolution and support a confession of faith

The hottest topic among Baptists in the 1920s was alarm over the teaching of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution; this concern resulted in the 1925 adoption of the first confession of faith of the SBC. Mississippi Bap-

tists were directly involved in these events.

The controversy heated up in 1921 when J. Frank Norris, the outspoken conservative pastor of First Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, accused Baylor University of supporting Darwinism. Many Baptists in Mississippi expressed concern over the teaching of the theory of evolution as early as 1922. On October 24, 1922, the Simpson County Baptist Association appealed to the state convention to appoint a committee “to investigate the character of text-books used in the free schools and colleges of our state ... especially if in these schools any teaching is discovered that contradicts the unmistakable teachings of the Word of God.” The state convention president appointed a committee made up of Baptist educators to investigate the matter. The committee failed to report in 1923, but that year, Mississippi Baptist evangelist Thomas T. Martin published an anti-evolution book entitled *Hell and the High Schools: Christ or Evolution, Which?* Martin criticized the educational elite—“a lot of high brows supported by your taxes”—and called on parents to take control of their children’s education.⁴⁶

In 1924, J. W. Provine asked that the committee be relieved of its responsibility “since the Committee is composed of those connected with the schools.” The Committee on Committees appointed a new committee at the 1924 state convention, which reported a resolution the very next day, decrying that public school textbooks “almost universally teach Evolution,” and saying that “the teaching of this hypothesis is both a perversion of science and a violation of the religious freedom of our people.” The resolution protested the use of tax dollars to oppose Christian doctrine, warned schools not to employ books or teachers that taught evolution, and petitioned the legislature of Mississippi to instruct the Text Book Commission “to adopt no books for use in our schools that teach the unproven hypothesis of Evolution.”⁴⁷

In 1925, the state superintendent of schools responded by banning the teaching of evolution in the state’s classrooms, although the Mississippi legislature rejected a law against teaching evolution. However, Tennessee did pass an anti-evolution law in 1925, which sparked a controversy that was literally heard around the nation. John Scopes, a teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, was put on trial for violating the law. The famous lawyer Clarence Darrow defended Scopes, and the prosecution was led by William Jennings Bryan, the three-time Democratic nominee for president. The

Scopes Monkey Trial, as it was nicknamed, turned into a media circus, as it was aired live on the radio and heard by millions. The following year, Mississippi also passed a law against teaching evolution. The American Civil Liberties Union offered to represent any teacher willing to challenge the Mississippi bill in the courts, but no one took them up on the offer.⁴⁸

In this tumultuous environment, the SBC adopted its very first doctrinal statement in 1925. Although local churches and associations had published statements of faith for years, larger Baptist organizations had resisted doing so, believing their only creed should be the Bible. In response to concerns raised by J. Frank Norris and others about liberalism, particularly evolution, Baptists began discussing the possibility of having an official statement of faith. This feeling was strong in Mississippi; in 1924, the MBC had adopted a resolution that requested that the trustees and faculty of each Baptist school prepare a statement of beliefs to which every teacher would be required to subscribe. Similar discussions were happening in other states and at the SBC. In 1924, the SBC rejected a call to make a doctrinal statement binding, but it did elect a committee to write a confession of faith chaired by Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president and Mississippi native E. Y. Mullins. With the national attention of the Scopes trial, Southern Baptists were ready to adopt the Baptist Faith and Message, a statement of faith recommended by Mullins's committee in 1925.⁴⁹

Mullins chose to model the Baptist Faith and Message after the New Hampshire Confession of Faith, which modified some of the strong Calvinist language of other Baptist confessions. Regarding God's work of grace, the new faith statement said, "Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which he regenerates, sanctifies, and saves sinners. It is perfectly consistent with the free agency of man ..." Instead of saying that Baptists were the only true church, as Landmark Baptists would have it, it simply said, "A church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel ..." While the statement did not mention evolution, it affirmed, "Man was created by the special act of God, as recorded in Genesis." In 1926, George W. McDaniel explicitly stated in his presidential address that Southern Baptists rejected evolution. A resolution was adopted making this "McDaniel Statement" binding on all those working for Southern Baptist institutions. Likewise, in November 1926 the MBC adopted a statement of faith that all college fac-

ulty were required to sign. In the first sentence, it affirmed belief in “God the creator of all things.”⁵⁰

Social issues

Most White Mississippians were determined to maintain segregation through intimidation and violence. Lynching Black people was not uncommon in Mississippi, especially after the renewed popularity of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. Although Baptist churches in Mississippi were segregated, state convention leaders understood that many Black people belonged to other Baptist groups in the state. In 1921, the MBC passed a resolution by J. W. Provine and A. H. Longino stating, “We ask our pastors to lay this matter on the consciences of our people to the end that our relations with the colored people be characterized by patience, justice, and Christian charity.”⁵¹

The state convention spoke on several other social issues. In 1920, the state convention responded to a communication from Lucedale Baptist Church, Lucedale (George), by passing a resolution “that gambling and dancing are contradictory to the teachings of Christ and the apostles and are foes to the spiritual life.” In 1918, the convention spoke out against the manufacture of “the deadly cigarette and Coca-Cola.”⁵²

However, the social issue that united Baptists most of all was opposition to alcohol. Baptists were at the forefront of the Prohibition movement, urging teetotalism—complete abstinence from alcohol. To those who claimed they had a right to drink, the state convention replied, “No Christian has a right to weaken his physical or mental powers, except in cases where it becomes his duty to sacrifice self, wholly or in part, for God’s glory or humanity’s good.” In July 1907, a statewide Prohibition committee met at First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), and planned a mass meeting in Jackson on January 9, 1908. Prohibition was so successful in Mississippi that in 1908, Mississippi’s legislature passed a statewide law. The MBC also campaigned for national Prohibition. In 1911, members were urged to vote for candidates for Congress who pledged to support the cause. When the 18th Amendment to the United States Constitution, banning alcohol, was proposed by Congress, Mississippi was the first state to ratify it in January

1918. The convention celebrated this victory, noting, “The bone-dry law has worked wonders, in several of the counties keeping the jails empty, or nearly so, most of the time. Many families in Mississippi are now having more to eat, more to wear, better educational and religious advantages, and better conditions generally.” They cited as evidence that the number of convicts in the penitentiary had declined by 108 since 1917.⁵³

Renewed interest in preserving Mississippi Baptist history

Methodist, John Griffing Jones, himself a descendant of Baptist pioneer Richard Curtis, included Baptists in his book, *A Concise History of the Introduction of Protestantism into Mississippi and the Southwest*, published in 1866. Decades later, in 1895, L. S. Foster published a collection of short biographies entitled *Mississippi Baptist Preachers*. The death of Adelia Hillman on July 17, 1902, sparked interest in preserving Mississippi Baptist history. Hillman had served as a librarian, faithfully preserving records kept by L. S. Foster and the Mississippi Baptist Historical Society, which had chartered in 1888. This renewed interest in Mississippi Baptist history led to the publication of *A Complete History of Mississippi Baptists* by Z. T. Leavell and T. J. Bailey in 1904. After Leavell and Bailey’s book was published, the Mississippi Baptist Historical Society ceased to function. John T. Christian wrote an unpublished manuscript entitled “History of Mississippi Baptists” in 1924. In 1926, the MBC appointed a standing committee on Baptist history and research, which inherited the historical records. Jesse L. Boyd published *A Popular History of the Baptists in Mississippi* in 1930.⁵⁴

Chapter 10

The Great Depression and World War II Era

1930 – 1949

The stock market crash in October 1929 set in motion an economic contraction that lasted for years. Bank failures and many Americans' loss of lifetime savings in the stock market crash made the Great Depression different from any previous financial panics. By 1931, 85 banks failed in Mississippi alone. The price of cotton dropped from 20 cents a pound in 1929 to eight cents in 1930 and six cents in 1931. Farmers' income dropped by two-thirds between 1929 and 1932. By 1932, the annual per capita income in Mississippi was just \$126. Nationwide, by 1932, unemployment rose to 25%. Since most Mississippians lived in rural areas, gardens and farms could keep residents fed. The greater problem was their inability to pay mortgages and other debts, thus they lost property and joined the ranks of tenants and sharecroppers. On a single day in April 1932, 20% of all the farmland and 12%–15% of all town property in the state was sold at auction for nonpayment of taxes and debts. By the middle of the decade, almost 40,000 family farms in Mississippi had been lost to foreclosure.¹

Mississippi's government was already in debt, and the Depression worsened the problem. Political feuding over the impeachments and acquittals of the state's attorney general in 1929 and chairman of the tax commission in 1930 paralyzed the government from acting on the economy. Angry voters only reelected 19 of 140 legislators in 1931, and they elected as governor

Martin “Mike” Conner, the arch political enemy of the outgoing governor Theodore G. Bilbo. Conner inherited a debt of \$50 million, an operational deficit of \$13 million, and on top of that, the state had a deplorable credit rating. Since so many citizens were losing their land to property taxes, Conner pushed through a 2% retail sales tax in 1932. It was so unpopular that the governor received death threats, but it restored financial stability to the government. The same year, he gave tax relief to homeowners with a homestead exemption law.²

On the national level, in 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president with a Democratic majority in Congress. He established 26 government agencies for economic recovery, many of which became household names in Mississippi. Among them were the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Farm Credit Administration (FCA), Public Works Administration (PWA), and Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). The TVA provided electricity to rural areas through the construction of dams on the Tennessee River, which had a dramatic economic effect in north Mississippi. Lorena Hickok, a resident of Tupelo, wrote in a letter to Harry Hopkins in 1934, “Down in Tupelo everybody seems to be feeling grand,” as six companies had opened that sold electric equipment such as stoves and refrigerators.³

Two years later, Tupelo suffered one of its worst disasters. On April 5, 1936, a Sunday night, an F5 tornado hit Tupelo just as many people were leaving evening worship services. The tornado killed more than 216 people in Lee County; it destroyed the auditorium of First Baptist Church, Tupelo (Lee), and many other church structures. The congregation constructed a new worship center on the old foundation and repaired Sunday school annex buildings, completing the work in 1936.⁴

The TVA may have made a few Mississippians feel grand, but other factors helped lift the economy all over the state. First was the economic program of Governor Hugh White, who succeeded Conner. White focused on paving roads to help industry and tourism, increasing the percentage of paved highways from 15% to 65%. In 1936, White established the Balance Agriculture with Industry (BAWI) program, designed to diversify the state’s economy by attracting industry. When America entered World War II in 1941, Mississippi benefitted from defense industries and large training camps at Camp Shelby in Hattiesburg, Camp McCain in Grenada, Keesler

Airfield in Biloxi, and other military bases at Bay St. Louis, Clarksdale, Columbus, Grenville, Greenwood, Gulfport, Jackson, Meridian, and Laurel.⁵

Southern Baptist agencies were already in debt due to the failure to reach the goals of the 75 Million Campaign. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) established a more orderly plan of giving in 1925 with the Cooperative Program. Sadly, Baptists were not prepared for the financial fallout on the horizon. *The Baptist Record* published a front-page article on January 2, 1930, from George W. Truett, president of the SBC, who optimistically said, "Better Day Dawning for Southern Baptists." Truett said that the "blessings of recent months are only a foretaste of the blessings that await us as a people in 1930." Instead, in September of that year, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary almost closed its doors and was only saved because Southern Seminary volunteered to cut its funding and pay its own bills from an endowment. The Foreign Mission Board had to convince banks to give it time to pay a \$1 million debt, and the Home Mission Board, under the guidance of J. B. Lawrence, renegotiated its debt and cut back drastically on its projects and missionary force. The SBC was largely made up of rural churches, and as Southern farmers lost their land, many of them migrated west, only to find farmers in the Midwest were leaving a "dust bowl" of crop failure to head still farther west, to the Pacific Coast. The social upheaval was devastating.⁶

Southern Baptist leaders from Mississippi

In addition to J. B. Lawrence, who guided the Home Mission Board through the Great Depression, other Mississippians prominent in the SBC during this time were Frances Landrum Tyler, Roland Q. Leavell, Norman W. Cox, and T. Luther Holcomb.

Tyler was a native of Ellisville who grew up in the missions program of First Baptist Church, Laurel (Jones); she was elected recording secretary of the Southern Baptist WMU in 1938. She was a graduate of Mississippi Woman's College and wife of Dr. W. C. Tyler, a professor at Blue Mountain College.⁷

Roland Q. Leavell, a native of Oxford and brother of Landrum P. Leavell, was chosen as president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

(NOBTS) in 1946. Shortly after becoming president of NOBTS, Leavell negotiated the purchase of 75 choice acres on Gentilly Boulevard, where the campus was relocated in 1953.⁸

Norman W. Cox, pastor of First Baptist Church, Meridian (Lauderdale), preached the annual sermon before the SBC in Oklahoma City on May 18, 1949; he was the first Mississippian to do so since R. A. Venable in 1897.⁹

T. Luther Holcomb led the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. A native of Purvis, he graduated from Mississippi College and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and served as pastor in Durant, Yazoo City, Pontotoc, and Columbus. He went to Texas in the 1920s, where he was a pastor and executive secretary of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. In June 1935, Holcomb became executive secretary-treasurer of the Baptist Sunday School Board (BSSB). This was the one agency in the SBC that maintained financial stability during the Depression years. It provided many services that were desperately needed to strengthen churches. During these hard times, the BSSB continued to publish Sunday school literature; established its publishing arm, Baptist Press; provided training courses for Sunday school workers; and changed the name of the Baptist Young People's Union to the Baptist Training Union, since it now included all ages.¹⁰

How churches coped with the Great Depression

During the Great Depression, nearly every church had financial struggles whether the church was large or small. First Baptist Church, Natchez (Adams), had already begun a new building when the stock market crashed; they dedicated that building in 1930. Unfortunately, the debt of approximately \$25,000 proved a heavy burden. The pastor, W. A. Sullivan, asked that his own salary be cut and the difference be applied to the church debt. Despite this and other sacrifices, in January 1932, the church was unable to pay the interest on their loan. To avoid default, the church took out another loan to pay the interest on the first loan. It was not until 1939 that the financial situation improved enough that the church began to pay down the principal; it took the Natchez church until 1945 to pay off the debt.¹¹

First Baptist Church, Clinton (Hinds), borrowed money to build a new building in 1923 but struggled to pay the debt, as it was a small church, with a large majority of the members being college students with little income. The Clinton church's building debt was a third of its income when the Great Depression began, and the church had little means to pay. In April 1933, the deacons recommended that the pastor serve a month without pay and that payments toward the debt be deferred for six months, paying only the interest. It would be another 10 years before they finally paid the debt.¹²

Calvary Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), was a large congregation of 1,600 members in 1930, but many members lost their jobs and left Jackson to seek work elsewhere. They appointed a five-man committee to present a plan to cut expenses. At first, they proposed moderate cuts, eliminating salaries for choir members, getting rid of one telephone, and urging "strictest economy" in electricity and water use. But as offerings continued to fall, they slashed other salaries and stopped purchasing Sunday school literature.¹³

When the Great Depression started, C. J. Olander was pastor of First Baptist Church, Brandon (Rankin), as well as Bethel, Fannin, and Pisgah churches in Rankin County; he also started the church at Flowood in Rankin County. Olander later wrote, "The depression became so severe that the members [at Flowood] moved out for the time being and came back and reorganized." First Baptist Church, Brandon, paid him \$450 a year. To supplement his income, Olander sold milk to townspeople and kept a garden for food. In 1935, Olander went to the Delta to pastor five churches at once, even though a friend warned him, "You will never be heard of again and the folk will starve you to death." Olander said, "It was bad, it was bankrupt, yet today as a result of that ministry there are six full time churches. There was Morgan City, Tchula, Blaine, Cruger, Sidon, and Harmony."¹⁴

Sometimes Mississippi Baptists were able to help destitute people who arrived from out of state. In the early 1930s, late at night people would pass by First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), and hear beautiful music by Mozart and Beethoven. Others reported hearing a piano play at the church at midnight, but no lights were on. W. A. Hewitt, the pastor, never permitted the doors to be locked, and there was a big loft in the building near the

sloping roof. One night, the janitor was about to enter the room when he saw a doorknob turn, and he ran for his life. Soon afterwards, members discovered that the nighttime musician was a lawyer from New York City who had been ruined in the Great Depression. He had nearly lost his mind, and he fled to Jackson. Hiding in the loft by day, he went downstairs every night to play the piano. Members took up a collection to help him out.¹⁵

Some churches managed to thrive despite the Depression. A. L. Goodrich was called to pastor First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (Pontotoc), just 30 days before the banks closed. Rather than let it dampen his spirits, Goodrich focused on sharing the gospel and helping his community. The energetic pastor joined local civic clubs, took leadership positions in his association and the state convention, and organized the Pontotoc Cotton Plan to give hundreds of dollars to the Mississippi Baptist Orphanage. In his years as pastor, 1931-35, church membership increased by 232. Sunday night worship attendance at First Baptist Church, Pontotoc, was equal to morning worship; they started three choirs, paid off an old debt, and installed a pipe organ.¹⁶

During the Great Depression, many Mississippi churches could only afford to pay their pastors with vegetables, chickens, eggs, and meat from their gardens and farms. The only way that many small country churches could find a pastor was to have one come once or twice a month. In 1930, Will Turner, a leader from Straight Bayou Baptist Church (Sharkey) asked C. C. Carraway, the young pastor of Midnight Baptist Church, Midnight (Humphreys), if he would preach at Straight Bayou as well. Carraway, a student at Mississippi College, said he would. Turner asked how much his round-trip train ticket cost from Clinton to Midnight, and he said it was \$4.28. Turner said, "Then that's what we'll pay you each time you come."¹⁷

Some pastors served many churches at once. T. P. Grantham served as pastor of 10 churches in Neshoba County in 1932. Daniel Wesley Moulder of Lorena in Smith County served as pastor of as many as 11 churches at once. Born on November 26, 1867, Moulder was in his 60s at the time of the Great Depression, yet "Brother Dan" kept going strong. He preached at different locations every weekend, multiple times every Saturday and Sunday, and even occasionally on Friday nights. He wore out over a dozen Fords and Chevrolets serving his multiple congregations. Moulder eventually served 42 different churches in Smith, Simpson, Jones, Rankin,



Daniel Moulder.
*Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Baptist
Historical Commission.*

Hinds, Covington, and Scott counties, 16 of which he organized. In 1932, he preached 330 sermons in churches of which he was pastor and 40 more sermons in other churches. He baptized 117 people in 1932, received 75 other new members, conducted 70 funerals, and performed six weddings. In 1933, Moulder was already serving 10 different churches at once as pastor when he organized another in Lorena in Smith County. During the Great Depression, each weekend he preached to churches scattered across Simpson, Smith, and Rankin counties. He once told a preacher who said he had nothing to preach, “Get your Bible and go among your people. You’ll receive more than you’ll ever be able to preach.” When Moulder died in 1953, he was buried at Goodwater Baptist Church (Smith), the church where he had been ordained. The Mississippi Baptist Convention (MBC) annual honored Moulder as “one of Mississippi’s greatest country preachers,” and the Smith County Baptist Association remembered him as “Mississippi’s most widely known and best-loved minister.”¹⁸

Mississippi Baptists under R. B. Gunter, 1930-39

Richard Baker Gunter officially began leading the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) as corresponding secretary in 1921. As the na-

tion plunged into the Great Depression, Gunter knew that farmers were suffering. He reported to the state convention in November 1930, "In many respects this has been our hardest year." These difficulties led the convention to meet in two special sessions in addition to the regular fall session in 1930 in a desperate effort to come up with a creative solution for two major problems.¹⁹

The first problem was the desperate financial condition of Clarke Memorial College. On March 7, 1930, at a joint meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Education Commission and the board of trustees of Clarke Memorial College, President W. T. Lowrey said the college could not survive unless the commission provided \$5,000 for the current session and ensured the same amount for the 1930–1931 session, plus \$5,000 for repairs to the property. The frustrated commission members answered that the treasury was empty and they had no authority to borrow money. Considering the situation hopeless, Lowrey resigned, effective June 1, 1930. The trustees elected John F. Carter chairman of the faculty and declared their intention to continue operations on its limited income until the next session of the convention.²⁰

The second problem was the indictment of W. E. Thompson, superintendent of the Mississippi Baptist Orphanage, by a Hinds County grand jury, for administering corporal discipline to a 19-year-old female resident of the orphanage. Thompson had been successful in getting the orphanage out of debt, but this incident sparked widespread calls for his resignation. In January, the trustees defended Thompson, but the controversy did not go away, and on April 1, 1930, the trustees of the orphanage threw up their hands and dumped the whole issue in the lap of the state convention. They called for Thompson to resign as soon as a replacement could be secured, and then the entire orphanage board itself resigned, saying, "Let Dr. Gates and Dr. Gunter ... appoint a superintendent of this Home and to come here and take Mr. Thompson's place."²¹

L. G. Gates, president of the MBC, called for an unprecedented special session of the MBC to deal with both problems. A large gathering of 547 messengers convened for the special session on April 24, 1930. Their purpose was to consider closing Clarke College and relocating the Mississippi Baptist Orphanage from Jackson to the Clarke property in Newton and selling the orphanage property in Jackson to purchase the Newton prop-

erty. The minutes recorded, "After a discussion, participated in by a large number of messengers, the discussion continued largely throughout the day, it was ordered that Clarke Memorial College be discontinued." Messengers then proceeded to elect a new board of trustees for the orphanage to replace the board members who had resigned.²²

It is one thing for a convention to take a vote and quite another to carry it out, as the state convention had learned in the 1892 debate over the relocation of Mississippi College. Many supporters of both the orphanage and Clarke College were passionately opposed to the vote of the special session. In addition, there were legal considerations that had not been handled in the session, particularly the charter of the orphanage, which did not give the state convention authority to sell its property. To deal with these legal matters, Gates called a second special session of the MBC.²³

The second special session met on July 15, 1930, in Newton, and was attended by 318 messengers. This session erupted into a chaotic state of confusion, described by *The Baptist Record* as featuring "unanimous disagreement, often vociferously expressed." Gunter made a plea for harmony, but it went unheard. W. N. Taylor of Clinton presented resolutions to continue Clarke College and keep the orphanage near Jackson, effectually rescinding the vote of the previous session. Gates ruled the resolutions out of order, but a challenge was made to his ruling; the messengers voted 164-154 to sustain his ruling. Next, M. P. Love of Hattiesburg moved that the property of the orphanage be mortgaged to pay the debts of Clarke College, but his resolutions were voted down. At a stalemate, the messengers adjourned to dinner. *The Baptist Record* commented that the only thing the messengers agreed about was that "the people of Newton and vicinity furnished a good dinner." Afterwards, the messengers returned and reversed their earlier actions. This time, Gates' ruling was overturned. Next, the messengers adopted Taylor's resolutions, voting to keep the orphanage in Jackson and to re-open Clarke College. To pay for it, the messengers authorized the trustees to borrow the money, using the property of the college and orphanage as security. In addition, they pledged an extra \$10,000 each to Blue Mountain College and Mississippi Woman's College. The debacle of these two special sessions taught Mississippi Baptists a lesson they had not learned from the 1892 convention: that attempts to operate their institutions from the floor of the convention could lead to great confusion and chaos.²⁴

Clarke Memorial College reopened on September 16, 1930, with 71 students and a new president, John F. Carter. However, at the regular session of the state convention in November, the education commission recommended that Clarke be closed. W. N. Taylor made a motion to keep Clarke open, and the issue was debated once again. This time Taylor's motion failed, and the decision was made to close the college and have the trustees pay its debts by selling the property. Still, the college did not die. Instead, on April 13, 1931, the college's board of trustees agreed to lease the school to a group of Baptists in east-central Mississippi. The Clarke College Holding Commission maintained its charter and kept the college going independently of the MBC until 1945, when the improved economy and need to educate soldiers returning from World War II led the MBC to welcome Clarke College back into its fold.²⁵

Gunter felt deeply his responsibility to pay Mississippi Baptist debts, but the decision at the 1930 state convention to borrow money and increase gifts to the colleges only made the debt problem worse. Gunter urged his idealistic brothers and sisters in Christ to take a realistic look at the financial challenge they faced. Revenue to the Cooperative Program continued to fall, making it harder to minister. Gunter reported that Cooperative Program receipts fell from \$205,110.03 in May 1930 to \$173,014.47 in May 1931. Designated offerings fell even more drastically, from \$102,575.04 to \$51,857.07 in the same period. The MBCB continued to tighten its belt. At the December 1930 board meeting, it voted to cut all department head salaries by 10% and to discontinue the departments of evangelism and stewardship as of April 1, 1931. In 1931, the board announced another reduction in employee salaries.²⁶

Gunter's call for financial restraint was supported by J. W. Lee, editor of *The Baptist Record*, who noted that the state convention board was tightening its belt but the education commission was not, due to votes at recent state conventions to borrow money for the colleges, which he warned would only ruin the institutions. To those who said it was better to borrow than to cripple the institutions, Lee replied, "A crippled institution is far better than an institution sold under a creditor's hammer." The convention heeded these calls for financial restraint, and in 1932 it instructed the state convention board to assume the work of the education commission. This action consolidated the administrative work under the board and elimi-

nated having a special commission to oversee the Baptist colleges of the state. In April 1932, Gunter reported that some state convention workers voluntarily reduced their own salaries.²⁷

Despite this belt-tightening, the financial situation worsened. As local churches struggled, so did the state convention. In July 1932, only 193 Mississippi Baptist churches contributed to the Cooperative Program, and 209 made designated offerings, but 1,059 other churches failed to make any contributions to the convention. The debt of the education commission for the Baptist colleges was so extreme that in February 1933, to borrow the money to meet maturing bonds, the state convention board had to promise the banks that all funds coming in from Cooperative Program receipts would be set aside for the payment of these loans. This meant no agency could be funded until the education commission loan obligations were paid. The funds were impounded until May 1.²⁸

Gunter never once suggested that Mississippi Baptists would default. He reduced his own salary and sold his home that was owned by the denomination, applying the proceeds toward the debt. "This one thing we do, pay our debts," became the motto under his column in *The Baptist Record*. The state convention board fell a month behind in paying employee salaries. Despite an immediate need to pay the banks \$18,000 in loan interest, and with no money at hand, Gunter promised, on June 1, 1933: "We say to our creditors that the faith and credit of Mississippi Baptists will be maintained AT PAR." On June 15, Gunter reported that only one-seventh of the funds needed had come in, and his tone was strident: "Poverty cannot be used as an alibi or an excuse for not having raised the full amount of interest due. ... The failure to pay is not our most serious problem. Our most serious problem is the willingness. ... Our greatest need is for pulpit leadership which will cause our membership to be honest." Gunter continued to make appeals in *The Baptist Record* throughout 1933 and 1934, publishing a list of which churches contributed to the debt.²⁹

The board called for special offerings on the debt on Redemption Day, the fourth Sunday in December 1934. On January 1, 1935, *The Baptist Record* published a list of 62 church and individual contributions to the debt. Of \$1,371.96 given, more than half came from six contributors, while most gifts were very small amounts, such as \$1 each from Rocky Creek Baptist Church (George), Union Baptist Church (Panola), and New Fellowship

Baptist Church (Jasper). Just 55 cents were given by Fifth Avenue Baptist Church, Hattiesburg (Forrest), the congregation that would, in the late 1940s, become Temple Baptist Church, Hattiesburg (Lamar). During the Great Depression, many were giving out of their poverty.³⁰

The state convention continued to cut funds and seek to raise revenue throughout the Great Depression. At the 1935 annual meeting in Meridian, the MBC voted to withdraw its annual \$10,000 contribution to Blue Mountain College and Mississippi Woman's College. The schools were permitted to raise their own endowments, but they were not allowed to borrow money on pledges. In 1936, the board copied a successful fundraising idea. Called the Five Thousand Club, it was modeled on a similar Baptist Hundred Thousand Club adopted by the SBC three years before to pay off Southern Baptist agency debts. The concept was simple: It aimed to enlist 5,000 Mississippi Baptists to contribute \$1 per month on the debts. The Mississippi WMU immediately assumed the responsibility of enlisting 2,500 women. In January 1937, Gunter reported on the success of the Five Thousand Club, saying it had already enlisted over 4,000 monthly donors. "Every day the mail brings additional subscription cards. ... The pastors are cooperating beautifully in our Five Thousand Club movement." The MBC was finally on its way to getting out of debt.³¹

By the mid-1930s there were signs that Mississippi Baptists were enjoying better financial health. One sign was the occasional report of increased pastors' salaries, such as that of First Baptist Church, Picayune (Pearl River), which raised its pastor's salary by \$400 in 1935. Another positive sign was a phenomenal increase in subscriptions to *The Baptist Record*. A. L. Goodrich left the pastorate of First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (Pontotoc), to become circulation manager of *The Baptist Record* in 1935, and he was highly successful in getting churches to put in their budgets the "Every-Family Plan" to mail the newspaper to every household in their congregation.³²

On October 29, 1936, *The Baptist Record* published a special edition to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the state convention. The MBC held its 1936 meeting in Natchez in recognition of the anniversary, as the convention was organized near Natchez at Clear Creek Baptist Church, Washington (Adams). Baptist historian Jesse L. Boyd and others gave speeches on Mississippi Baptist history. After the meeting, a boulder was dedicated at

the site of Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson) on Coles Creek, the location of the first Baptist church in Mississippi.³³

Despite the financial hard times, many Mississippi Baptist programs grew during the 1930s, so much so that by the end of the decade a formal calendar of denominational activities was adopted, filled with meetings every month. Church membership was on the rise as well. Mississippi Baptist church membership had increased to 272,281 in 1938. Sunday school enrollment began the decade at 131,649 and closed the decade at 148,303. In 1931, Jackson, the state capital, hosted the Southern Baptist Sunday School Conference, attended by over 4,000 people. Although the 1933 BYPU Convention was canceled due to the Depression, during the decade, enrollment grew from 34,613 to 44,133. Large gatherings at BYPU conventions provided a social outlet for many young people and adults in a period when social life was limited by economic conditions.³⁴

In 1937, the SBC voted to develop a report on the state of church music. The report, which was presented at the 1938 meeting of the SBC, included specific information about each state. Forty-six Mississippi Baptist churches were surveyed: Nearly all had pianos, and six had organs. Of the favorite songs, three-fourths were gospel hymns. The seven most popular songs among Mississippi Baptists in 1938 were "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," "Standing on the Promises," "I Am Thine, O Lord," "Amazing Grace," "Have Thine Own Way, Lord," "Love Lifted Me," and "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder." Churches used a variety of songbooks, often bought from itinerant singing-school teachers. Traveling from community to community, these teachers would conduct one- or two-week singing schools, often utilizing "shape notes" that were easier to learn than traditional sheet music. In response to this survey, the SBC published the *Broadman Hymnal* in 1940, and for the first time, many Mississippi Baptists had a standard hymnal in common.³⁵

Margaret Lackey resigned as leader of the Mississippi WMU in December 1930, and Fannie Traylor was elected in her place as the new corresponding secretary. By the end of the decade, there were over 2,000 WMU organizations in Mississippi Baptist churches, faithfully supporting mission education and mission offerings. The WMU sponsored camps for nearly 2,000 boys and girls every year. Traylor continued to promote the State Mission Week of Prayer, and in 1938 this offering was named after

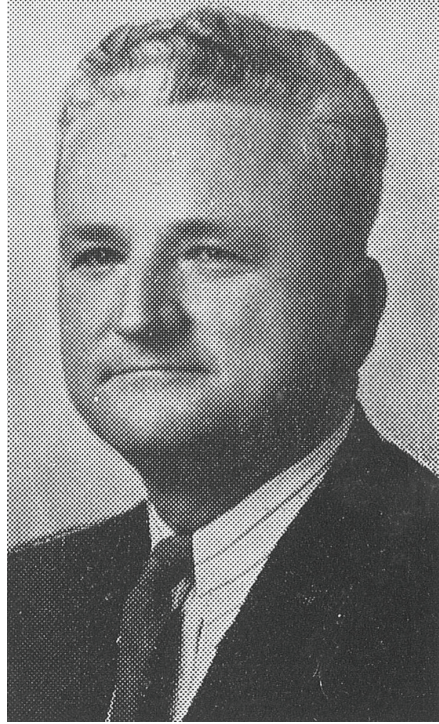
Lackey. The men were always slower than the women to become involved in missions, but in 1939, the state convention endorsed the Baptist Brotherhood, the successor to the Layman's Missionary Movement, to involve men in missions.³⁶

The 1938 annual meeting of the state convention was the first in years not dominated by pressing debts, and Gunter was able to declare all obligations to date had been met. Gunter desired to continue in office until all the debts were paid, but because of the stress under which he had labored so long, he requested to be granted retirement at the end of January 1939. On December 15, 1938, the editor of *The Baptist Record* congratulated Gunter on his pending retirement and praised him for leading Mississippi Baptists during "the period of deflation," remaining at the helm longer than any previous corresponding secretary of the MBCB, from 1921 to 1939. "It was a time when shipwreck could easily have been made of the Lord's work," said the editorial. Alluding to Esther 4:14, it concluded, "The secretary seemed to have been raised up for such a time as this." Although he retired, Gunter continued to be active in Mississippi Baptist work, serving as president of the state convention for the next three years, from 1940 to 1942.³⁷

Mississippi Baptists under D. A. McCall, 1939-49

Druie Anselm McCall, nicknamed "Scotchie," took over the leadership of the MBCB in 1939. Prior to becoming corresponding secretary, McCall served three Mississippi Baptist churches: Linn Baptist Church (Sunflower); Griffin Memorial Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds); and First Baptist Church, Philadelphia (Neshoba). His ministry got off to a good start in early 1939 with a focus on evangelistic meetings. An evangelism conference was held in Clinton from February 28 to March 3, 1939, featuring speakers from around the SBC. At the conference, McCall urged Baptists to conduct a revival meeting in every Baptist church during the year and in every community where there was not a church.³⁸

McCall and the executive committee of the board presented an aggressive program to the state convention in November 1939. It called for a minister's retirement plan, a three-year program to wipe out all debts, and a budget of \$250,000. A commission of 20, made up of five pastors,



DA McCall.

*Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Baptist
Historical Commission.*

five laymen, and the heads of the institutions and boards, was appointed to study all recommendations and coordinate the work of the convention. The minister's retirement plan was adopted, but as they were just coming out of the Depression, messengers were cautious and reduced the budget to \$225,000.³⁹

This cautious attitude surrounding money led to a debate at the 1939 state convention about what to do with the debt of Mississippi Woman's College. The editor of *The Baptist Record* reported, "For years we have had struggle and dissension in reference to Mississippi Woman's College." The college had not been able to pay down its debt or complete its endowment; it lacked \$35,000 and needed financial help to survive. The messengers debated whether to assume this financial responsibility. The education commission said yes; the Committee on Review said no. Messengers debated the issue at length; motions were made and amended and then withdrawn. In the middle of the debate, the convention paused for a prayer for divine guidance, led by T. W. Young of Corinth. Finally, the messengers voted for a motion proposed by Norman W. Cox of Meridian to pay the interest on

the college's debt for one year but nothing more. Cox's motion passed by only six votes, 118 to 112. The debate took so long that there was no time left for other speeches or reports, and the convention closed. The next year, Mississippi Woman's College closed, too. The college's inability to pay debt or raise an endowment and the loss of accreditation was too much for the school. On August 28, 1940, the trustees of the college ordered suspension of operations for the 1940–1941 session, expressing hope that “it may be temporary.”⁴⁰

Despite the temporary loss of Mississippi Woman's College, McCall continued to promote changes and new programs. At the 1939 convention, a committee headed by W. M. Whittington proposed a new constitution and bylaws, which were adopted in 1940. The 1940 constitution went into much more detail about oversight of the boards, institutions, and agencies of the state convention. Article IV of the new constitution, on election of messengers, reflected the segregation of the times, referring to messengers as being “from regular white Baptist churches,” a description that was not in the previous constitution. Article VII changed McCall's title from corresponding secretary to executive secretary, making it clear that this was a title of the administrative head of the MBCB. Several changes appear to have been the result of lessons learned in convention history. Having just come out of the Great Depression, Article X of the new constitution stated, “No new object or enterprise involving the expenditure of money shall be authorized” by the convention until the new project went through an extensive process of written review and favorable report from the agencies involved. The new bylaws went into greater detail about parliamentary procedure at meetings, and how agencies, committees, and reports were to function. Remembering the chaotic reversals of decisions at the two special sessions in 1930, the new bylaws stated in section 7: “No subject which shall have been decided shall again be considered during the same meeting, whether annual or special, unless a member who voted in the majority shall have moved a reconsideration.”⁴¹

As America came out of the Great Depression and entered World War II, Mississippi Baptists were also marching forward. At the state convention in 1942, the executive secretary presented an impressive financial report: Contributions for all causes were \$493,526.44, the most since the beginning of the 75 Million Campaign. The 1943 convention approved

the establishment of the Mississippi Baptist Foundation for the purpose of managing and receiving endowment funds. The next year, A. B. Pierce left the pastorate of First Baptist Church, New Albany (Union), to become secretary of the foundation. *The Baptist Record* described the 1943 convention as “a Victory Convention. The messengers had a feeling of triumph. ... Mississippi was within sight of the promised land of No Debt.”⁴²

While McCall and others wanted to expand ministries, the painful memories of the Great Depression caused many leaders to be cautious. The restriction on new spending in Article X of the 1940 constitution was not enough. In 1944, Copiah Baptist Association proposed an amendment to Article X, stating that no new project requiring money be approved “until the money for such projects is in hand.” The matter was held over for action in 1945 as required by the constitution. Meanwhile, the MBCB proceeded with a major purchase; on May 14, 1945, the board bought an office building directly across the street from the new capitol in Jackson, which contained 14,250 square feet of floor space, for \$110,000. Renamed the Baptist Building, it served as the MBC office building for the next 23 years. At the state convention in November 1945, the proposed amendment to Article X of the constitution was adopted, requiring money to be “in hand” for new projects and requiring announcements about proposed new expenditures to be made a month in advance in *The Baptist Record*.⁴³

While financially cautious, the state convention of 1945 made bold moves forward. The G.I. Bill of Rights, which Congress passed in 1944, provided financial aid for soldiers who were returning from the war to go to college. Seizing on this opportunity, the 1945 state convention moved to reopen and expand its colleges. Messengers voted to assume the operation of Clarke College once again, to reopen Mississippi Woman’s College in September 1947, and to make Mississippi College coeducational and erect a new dormitory for women on the campus in Clinton. The state convention president, Norman W. Cox, proposed that a committee selected by all four colleges come to an agreement on what percentage each school would get from Cooperative Program funds. In 1947, the committee recommended that funds for Christian education be distributed as follows: 35% to Mississippi College, 30% to Blue Mountain College, 20% to Mississippi Woman’s College, and 15% to Clarke Memorial College. The 1946 convention also renewed the education commission as a separate entity to

oversee the colleges; its duties had been incorporated into the state convention board during the Depression.⁴⁴

The Baptist colleges in Mississippi prospered in the 1940s. Blue Mountain College reported that it had no dormitory space and had to turn away students in 1946; it began construction on new dorms in 1949. Clarke College enrolled 341 students in 1949, some three-fourths of whom were studying for Christian ministry. Mississippi College enrolled 1,252 students in 1948-49, including 383 women. The college built two new dorms for women, as the college transitioned to being coeducational. Hillman College in Clinton, which had been owned by the Lowrey and Berry families, ran into financial problems during the Great Depression, so the property was transferred to Mississippi College as a lease agreement in 1942, and in 1945 the purchase was finalized. The Hillman College and Mississippi College student bodies, faculty, and curriculum were merged, drawing closer a partnership that began 89 years earlier. In the late 1940s, Mississippi College completed the construction of several new buildings, including Nelson Hall, with a clock tower that became an iconic symbol of the college. On September 9, 1947, Mississippi Woman's College reopened. D. A. McCall addressed an enthusiastic congregation on the campus in Hattiesburg as they celebrated, singing "Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow." Having been closed since 1940, the school had to start from scratch. Enrollment rose steadily from 76 in 1947 to 156 in 1949.⁴⁵

On April 2, 1947, Nell Taylor, young people's leader of the Mississippi WMU, dedicated Camp Garaywa near Clinton as a campground for boys and girls. The name of the camp was derived from the abbreviations of three youth mission organizations: Girls Auxiliary (GAs), Royal Ambassadors (RAs), and Young Women's Auxiliary (YWA). Camps for all three groups were conducted during the summer. At the time, Edwina Robinson, executive secretary of the state WMU, suggested pronouncing the camp "GAY-ray-way," with an emphasis on the first syllable, but over the years the pronunciation was simplified; while the emphasis remained on the first syllable, it came to be pronounced "GAIR-away".⁴⁶

Other Mississippi Baptist institutions expanded in the 1940s. The Mississippi Baptist Hospital rapidly expanded during the 1940s despite the fiscally conservative policy that required the hospital to only spend money it had in hand. In 1948, Karenza Gilfoy, superintendent of the hospital,

reported that the hospital had raised over \$600,000 for its building and remodeling without borrowing any money. From 1948 to 1949, the hospital admitted 13,217 patients. It had a nurses training school with 171 students, 43 of whom were Black. The Mississippi Baptist Orphanage in Jackson erected 15 new buildings and cared for more than 200 boys and girls. In 1949, the orphanage was also referred to by the name Children's Village, although this name would not become official until 1961.⁴⁷

In 1945, Luther A. Harrison became the first leader of the newly created Church Music Department for Mississippi Baptists. The Copiah County native eagerly began publicizing church music in a weekly column in *The Baptist Record*, using a graphic of a lyre intertwined with a cross. This symbol was used by other Baptist entities as well, but according to music historian L. Lavon Gray, Harrison was the original developer of the design.⁴⁸ He urged Baptists to move beyond the singing schools. Tirelessly traveling the state, Harrison held music conferences and organized choirs and singing groups in every Baptist association in the state. In 1947 and 1948, he traveled back and forth from Mississippi to Fort Worth to finish the last requirements for his bachelor of music degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. On March 5, 1948, Harrison completed his final examination, gave a graduation recital, and began his journey home to Clinton. Around 7 p.m., he telephoned his wife, Myrtle, to let her know that although he was tired, he wanted to drive home that night. She urged him to stop and rest. At some point in the early morning of March 6, Harrison's car overturned in the Lafourche Swamp east of Monroe, Louisiana, and he drowned in a creek. Tire marks indicated he had either fallen asleep or lost control of the car. McCall personally delivered the sad news to Myrtle around 4 a.m.⁴⁹

Although the outbreak of World War II created many new jobs and finally lifted America out of the Depression, the war effort also required rationing and caused social upheaval. Due to gas and tire rationing, the SBC called off its annual meetings in 1943 and 1945, and Mississippi Baptists scheduled nine district pastors conferences in 1945 in lieu of a statewide evangelism conference. Rationing also caused *The Baptist Record* to reduce its publication from 16 pages to eight for a time. The 1941 state convention in Meridian was the last one not held in Jackson; after that, the MBC began the practice of meeting annually in a centralized location: First Baptist

Church, Jackson (Hinds).⁵⁰

Camp Shelby, the training camp in south Mississippi, hosted 75,000 to 100,000 soldiers at any time. These soldiers looked forward to going to “town”—Hattiesburg—where their pursuits were not always spiritual. Mississippi Baptists were concerned about the decline in morality during the war. In 1943, a resolution proposed by the Copiah County Baptist Association was adopted by the state convention, decrying how social changes were leading the Mississippi legislature “to modify or weaken three of our basic moral laws, namely, those regarding the Liquor Traffic, Divorce, and Sunday Observance.” In his 1945 presidential address to the state convention, Norman W. Cox expressed concern for “the violation of liquor laws, gambling, and commercialized Sunday amusements.”⁵¹

The presence of Black troops stationed in Mississippi forced the state to face its greatest social problem: racism. Many soldiers were from the North, and they confronted racial segregation. Race riots broke out in 1943 when White men prevented Black soldiers from attending a dance at Camp Van Dorn near Centreville and when Black soldiers at Camp McCain near Grenada were beaten up in Starkville. Neither riot was reported in the state’s newspapers, as White officials tried to keep the events quiet. White Mississippi Baptist leaders responded to racism by continuing to pursue the old patronizing policy of separate-but-equal treatment. For example, in February 1944, D. A. McCall and other White Baptist leaders met at First Baptist Church, Indianola (Sunflower), with Herbert L. Lang, president of a new seminary in Jackson established to educate Black students, and they agreed to jointly sponsor the school. Thus, Mississippi Union Theological Seminary was chartered on March 15, 1944; the name was changed to Mississippi Baptist Seminary in 1948. For the next four decades, Southern Baptists and National Baptists jointly sponsored the seminary, with headquarters in Jackson and around 20 extension centers throughout the state. This sponsorship allowed White Baptists in Mississippi to support theological education for Black Baptists without admitting them to Southern Baptist colleges and seminaries. Bracey Campbell, pastor of Marks Baptist Church, Marks (Quitman), expressed this attitude in a Sunday school lesson published in *The Baptist Record* in November 1944. Campbell referred to Jesus’s parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 as “a living protest against race prejudice, which ought to characterize the Christian.” Calling

for fair treatment and social equality, Campbell said, “Then let the white Baptist treat the black brother justly.” While his words sounded noble, Campbell was not endorsing integration, whether at a dance or at a seminary, since he clarified that he was calling for “social equality—not social admixture.” The Civil Rights Movement was beginning in Mississippi, but in the late 1940s most White Baptists were not ready to support it.⁵²

The McCall Controversy

“Scotchie” McCall was the executive secretary–treasurer of the MBCB during a time of expansion and growth; however, clouds of suspicion began to swirl around his leadership in the postwar years. McCall fought back, and a power struggle ensued, which ended with his resignation in 1950. This conflict came to be called the McCall Controversy.

Three decades later, on November 11, 1980, five Mississippi Baptist leaders, Edwina Robinson, Owen Cooper, John W. Landrum, D. Swan Haworth, and Edward L. Byrd, sat down and made an hour-long recording on a cassette tape at the request of Earl Kelly, executive director–treasurer of the state convention board. The audio and accompanying documents were preserved in the archives of the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission and were not released until 2005. They revealed the details behind the controversy that raged around McCall in the late 1940s.

As early as 1942, Bess Eva Schilling, the bookkeeper of the MBCB, became uncomfortable with verbal requests from McCall to write checks without clear accounting. Schilling served three decades as bookkeeper, including under former state convention board executives J. B. Lawrence and R. B. Gunter. Gunter claimed that “her integrity was without the slightest suspicion.” However, Schilling was becoming suspicious of McCall. She requested he write down the requests for money, which he did. She saved many of these “slips of paper” and contacted Edwina Robinson, executive secretary of the Mississippi WMU, who in turn contacted Owen Cooper, a Baptist businessman from Yazoo City, and two pastors, D. Swan Haworth of Vicksburg and Edward L. Byrd of Meridian. Schilling wanted to resign, but they encouraged her to remain at the board and collect information for them.⁵³

One of their biggest concerns was McCall's use of a special account that he called the "R" account, which stood for "revival." When he was given an honorarium for preaching a revival or other speaking engagement, McCall would deposit the money in the R account instead of his own bank account and then spend it at will. Since he was a dynamic speaker, he preached around 20 revivals a year. He used the sizable R account to pay for such things as a Chevrolet for his sister, Geraldine McCall, in 1945, and for New Testaments mailed to pastors across the state in 1946. Cooper and others saw the R account as nothing more than a means to evade paying income taxes. When board members confronted McCall with questions about these expenditures at a meeting on April 9, 1948, McCall and his loyal supporters responded angrily, yet the opposition to McCall only grew. Pastors and laymen held meetings across the state to discuss their concerns. Since A. L. Goodrich, editor of *The Baptist Record*, was loyal to McCall—and under his authority—Henry Bucklew of Clinton began publishing *Southern Baptist News* on September 11, 1948, to give voice to the opposition. At the state convention in November 1948, a special committee of seven was appointed "to study the business affairs of our Convention." The committee was chaired by Frank Moody Purser, pastor of First Baptist Church, Oxford (Lafayette), and included some supporters of McCall, including G. C. Hodge, pastor of First Baptist Church, Biloxi (Harrison). The convention also adopted a resolution of appreciation for McCall.⁵⁴

In December 1948, McCall scolded Schilling, saying, "From the very first day I entered this office, you have presented one uncalled-for problem after another." Schilling responded by handing in her resignation on January 10, 1949. At the same time, McCall went on the offensive against board members who questioned his integrity. Among his targets were pastors Norman W. Cox of Meridian, Joe T. Odle of Gulfport, and J. B. Smith of Magee. McCall wrote to Cox's former home state of West Virginia to find negative stories about him and attempted to have Odle removed from the Southern Baptist Committee on Committees. Additionally, McCall informed Smith that the state convention was going to defund the ministry at the sanatorium in Magee.⁵⁵

On February 11, 1949, Schilling wrote to the entire executive committee of the state convention board, explaining why she resigned: "I was requested by memorandum to make entries in the books which I could

not do with a good and clear conscience.” Hodge wrote a letter on April 23, defending McCall and questioning the motives of his opponents, noticing most of their letters were mailed from Vicksburg, home of McCall opponent D. Swan Haworth. Hodge’s letter was mailed to board members, including Paul Townsend of Belzoni, who wrote to question McCall as to why Hodge’s letter was mailed in a convention board envelope. Townsend asked who paid to mail it, and McCall fired back, saying, “You, manifestly, have a mistaken notion of the importance of your position as a board member.” McCall complained of Townsend’s letter as a “nuisance” from “you and the little group of troublemakers associated with you.”⁵⁶

While accusations were raging in 1949, the special committee to study Baptist affairs, led by Frank M. Purser, was at work. The committee hired the auditing firm of Ernst & Ernst of New Orleans. On October 13, 1949, the auditors reported to the board several financial irregularities, including “that the R account has been so handled that it is difficult, if not next to impossible, to determine whether it was a personal or a board account.” Also, the audit found that “operating expenses and equipment purchases were indiscriminately charged to unrelated expense accounts ... based on memoranda from the office of the Executive Secretary of the Board.” The audit also found that credits for tiny contributions of a dollar or less each to the Cooperative Program were given to 172 churches in the 1948 convention annual, when the churches had made no such contributions. The money allegedly came from McCall’s R account, in order to inflate the number of churches contributing to denominational work. Ernst & Ernst recommended a host of financial reforms, including separating the work of treasurer from executive secretary. Rather than publish this audit and report as instructed, *The Baptist Record* reported a separate audit conducted by Sanford, Watkins, & Mize, which McCall hailed as “the greatest audit we have ever seen.” This audit had only praise for the bookkeeping of McCall and his staff. Incensed that the Ernst & Ernst audit had not been published in *The Baptist Record*, Owen Cooper had copies of it printed and distributed around the state, and a special edition of *Southern Baptist News* in November 1949 covered the Ernst & Ernst audit and many other accusations against McCall, including a report on the bogus church donations. Tensions mounted as the state convention approached; even secular newspapers in Jackson and Memphis reported on the two competing audits.⁵⁷

In a letter to McCall in October 1949, Baptist historian Jesse L. Boyd said that while he had been on the sidelines of the controversy, he had concluded that McCall should “step aside” for the good of all. Soon, a rumor circulated that McCall would indeed resign at the 1949 state convention. Hearing this rumor, his opponents decided not to press their advantage at the meeting; however, instead of resigning, McCall made a speech at the convention comparing his persecution with the crucifixion of Christ. The 1949 convention adjourned with McCall still in charge. What few Mississippi Baptists knew at the time was that McCall had been flying to Chicago every weekend since September 1 to serve as interim pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church. McCall’s opposition learned of this and leaked the information to *The Clarion-Ledger*, which contacted an Associated Press reporter in Chicago to send a report on McCall’s sermons at Tabernacle Baptist; *The Clarion-Ledger* published reports on the sermons each week. Some of McCall’s most ardent supporters began to ask him why he was serving a church out of state. At this point, McCall decided to resign as executive secretary of the state convention board, effective February 28, 1950, and he became pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church, Chicago.⁵⁸

The McCall Controversy left deep divisions among Mississippi Baptists that took years to heal. Reflecting on the McCall Controversy decades later, Owen Cooper said, “Any organization with a dynamic leader puts a lot of trust in that leader. We need to learn to lean more on the Lord and less on the leader.”⁵⁹

Chapter 11

Religious Revival and Racial Revolution

1950 – 1969

Will Campbell was a gadfly among Mississippi Baptists. Baptized in the Amite River by East Fork Baptist Church, Liberty (Amite), he later became director of religious life at the University of Mississippi in the 1950s. In 1956, Campbell raised the ire of the chancellor when he invited a supporter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to speak on campus. When he was caught playing table tennis on campus with a Black minister, Campbell wryly assured his dean that the game “was really quite within the Southern pattern. We had used separate but equal paddles, the ball was white, and there was a net tightly drawn between us.”¹

However, the tensions of the 1950s and 1960s were not a laughing matter. During this period, the United States experienced the stark contrasts of consumer culture and the Cold War, religious revival, and racial revolution. In 1948, only 172,000 Americans owned a television; by 1960, 90% of American homes had a TV. Americans watched Mississippi native Elvis Presley sing, Billy Graham preach, and Martin Luther King, Jr., declare that he had a dream. They watched reports of the Vietnam War, race riots at the University of Mississippi, the Apollo 11 moon landing, Hurricane Camille’s destruction of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Medgar Evers, and Martin Luther King, Jr.²

The 1950s were idealized in Mississippi history as a time of family values and rapid church growth, but the reality of racial oppression was simmering, and it exploded in the 1960s, as the state became ground zero for the Civil Rights Movement. Segregation was entrenched in Mississippi; it had been supported by the 1896 Supreme Court decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which permitted “separate but equal” public facilities for the races. The 1950 census showed for the first time in generations that Black people no longer comprised a majority of the population in the state since so many had left Mississippi in search of better opportunities and better treatment. However, a new generation of Black leaders arose in Mississippi in the 1950s and 1960s who demanded the right to vote and full integration into society: leaders like Medgar Evers, Aaron Henry, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Amzie Moore. In response to these civil rights activists, White people founded the Citizens’ Council and a state government agency, the Sovereignty Commission, to resist civil rights by any legal means possible, while groups like the Ku Klux Klan chose illegal means.³

Resistance to integration and to the voter registration of Black people in Mississippi turned violent. On September 30, 1962, federal marshals escorted James Meredith, the first Black student admitted to the University of Mississippi, and riots erupted, ending with two deaths and 160 marshals injured. President Kennedy sent 23,000 soldiers to restore order to the campus. In June 1963, Mississippi NAACP leader Medgar Evers was assassinated when a sniper shot him in front of his wife and children as he got out of his car in his own driveway. In August 1964, three young civil rights workers were discovered buried in an earthen dam on a farm in Neshoba County. Autopsies revealed that all three, Michael Henry Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and Earl Chaney, had been shot. In 1967, a federal grand jury indicted 18 men for the crimes, and an all-White jury in Meridian convicted seven of the defendants.

However, such dramatic changes occurred that by the end of the decade, Black people were finally registering to vote in large numbers, schools were integrating, and a new day was dawning in the Magnolia State.⁴

In August 1969, Mississippi endured the most destructive hurricane in state history to date. A Category 5 hurricane, Camille, split Ship Island in two with 200 mph winds that pushed a 22-foot-tall wall of water over the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Approximately 150 people died. It wreaked eco-

conomic devastation on south Mississippi timber and tung oil and on the Port of Gulfport, and it destroyed two Mississippi Baptist retreat centers.⁵

Southern Baptist leaders from Mississippi

Several Baptists with Mississippi ties were prominent in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) during this period, including Duke K. McCall, James L. Sullivan, H. Leo Eddleman, Norman W. Cox, Wilmer C. Fields, and W. Douglas Hudgins.

Duke McCall, a native of Meridian (and nephew of D. A. McCall), was elected president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) in 1951 at age 36, one of the youngest men ever to be elected president of a graduate school. McCall strongly supported civil rights, inviting Martin Luther King, Jr., to speak in chapel and in class in 1961. He led SBTS to significant growth until his retirement in 1982.⁶

James L. Sullivan, native of Silver Creek in Lawrence County, was offered the position of executive director–treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) in 1950, but he turned it down. Instead, Sullivan accepted leadership of the Baptist Sunday School Board (BSSB) in 1953 and served until 1975. He led the BSSB to establish the Church Study Course, Life and Work curriculum, and its publishing arm, Convention Press. Sullivan also wrote the book *Rope of Sand with Strength of Steel* to describe the effectiveness of the Cooperative Program.⁷

H. Leo Eddleman, born in Morgantown in Marion County, was elected president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1959 and served until 1969.⁸

Norman W. Cox, a native of Georgia, was pastor of First Baptist Church, Meridian (Lauderdale), from 1939 to 1951. On February 15, 1951, Cox became the first executive secretary of the newly created Historical Commission of the SBC. Cox led in the publication of the two-volume *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists* in 1958. He enlisted fellow Mississippians Joe Abrams, Jesse L. Boyd, and C. B. Hamlet, III, to write articles on Mississippi Baptist history for the book.⁹

W. C. Fields, a native of Louisiana, served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Yazoo City (Yazoo), and then as editor of *The Baptist Record* from

1956 to 1959. In 1959, Fields served the Southern Baptist Executive Committee as director and then vice president of public relations; he retired in 1987. During his tenure, Fields directed the work of Baptist Press, the news service of Southern Baptists. He also edited the material for the Baptist Bulletin Service. Southern Baptists were influenced for nearly two decades by the news articles and Sunday bulletins written and edited by Fields.¹⁰

W. Douglas Hudgins served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), for 22 years. In 1968, Hudgins became the third pastor from Mississippi to preach the convention sermon at the SBC.¹¹

Mississippi Baptists under Chester Quarles, 1950–68

Chester Lew Quarles was elected executive secretary of the MBCB and began his work on April 10, 1950. Quarles was born in Wiggins, Mississippi, on May 18, 1908. He was stricken with polio as a child and had a disabled arm for the rest of his life. He graduated from Howard College in Birmingham, Alabama, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Quarles ministered in Alabama as a pastor and worked for the Alabama Baptist Convention, then became pastor of First Baptist Church, Leland (Washington), from 1942 to 1947. From Leland, he became pastor of First Baptist Church, Sylacauga, Alabama. Since Quarles was away from Mississippi during the turbulent controversy over his predecessor, D. A. McCall, he was able to lead the Mississippi Baptist Convention (MBC) without being associated with either side of the controversy.¹²

In reaction to the McCall Controversy, the MBCB adopted a new, comprehensive set of guidelines to ensure accountability from associational missionaries, church building aid, limitations on pastorates and speaking engagements by board employees, accountability for out-of-state trips, editorial control of *The Baptist Record* by a committee instead of the executive secretary, and a ban on automobiles owned by the board. Additionally, new guidelines were put in place for minutes of board and executive committee meetings, personnel, revivals, quarterly reports of department heads, and retirement.¹³

A mark of distinction during Quarles's tenure was the prominent leadership of laymen in the state convention. In January 1951, the executive



Chester Quarles.
Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Baptist
Historical Commission.

secretary conducted 15 one-day leadership conferences and rallies for laymen spread throughout the state. Quarles desired to motivate lay involvement in four areas: evangelism, stewardship, church in action, and world missions. This emphasis on involvement by laymen paid off. Five different laymen served as president of the state convention during the Quarles years: Purser Hewitt, editor of the Jackson newspaper, *The Clarion-Ledger* (1951-52); Owen Cooper, executive of Mississippi Chemical Corporation in Yazoo City (1955-56); M. F. Rayburn, Meridian businessman (1959-60); Dr. Russell Bush, Jr., dentist from Columbia (1963-64); and Claude Townsend, owner of Townsend Piano Company in Jackson (1967-68). When Townsend was elected, *The Baptist Record* noted there had become a “tradition of alternating preacher and layman” as president of the state convention.¹⁴

In 1952, a special committee chaired by W. L. Meadows presented a complete rewriting of the constitution and bylaws of the MBC, and it was adopted in 1953. The new document was a more detailed expansion on the 1940 constitution, designed to deal with the growth of institutions. It included three sections: first, a constitution that was concisely worded; second, a detailed “Plan of Organization and Action” that described the functions of the MBCB and institutions; and third, bylaws that focused on how

to conduct the annual meetings. Applying lessons learned from the McCall Controversy, every board was required to have an annual audit, and it stated that the executive secretary of the board “may” also be treasurer. The 1940 constitution had referred to “regular white Baptist churches in Mississippi,” but the 1953 revision quietly removed the word “white.”¹⁵

Chester Quarles gave personal support to what was then called the Negro Work Department of the MBC. It promoted interracial conferences on February 22–26, 1954, attended by 1,500 leaders. Mississippi Baptists also supported Baptist Student Union work on historically Black college campuses, including Jackson College (now Jackson State University), Alcorn College (now Alcorn State University), and Mississippi Vocational College (now Mississippi Valley State University). The Mississippi Baptist Seminary system continued to thrive under the leadership of Dr. Herbert L. Lang, with 24 locations to provide theological education exclusively to Black Baptist leaders. The seminary reported an enrollment of 1,270 in 1954.¹⁶

Mississippi Baptists expanded their ministry throughout the 1950s. One of the first matters to consider was the future of Mississippi Woman’s College. Since reopening in 1947 under the leadership of Irving E. Rouse, its enrollment grew steadily from 76 students in 1947 to 149 by 1951. However, many felt that the all-women status of the college hindered its growth potential. During the debate over the issue, Sue Bell Johnson, wife of the college’s former president, prayed, “Lord, if Woman’s College can help bring in the Kingdom, save it.” In 1953, the Mississippi Baptist Education Commission presented the state convention with two choices regarding the college: close it or make it coeducational. Messengers voted overwhelmingly to make it coeducational. Then messengers took another vote on whether the college should be a junior or senior college, and, by a vote of 304 to 291, they voted to make it a senior college. Knowing it could no longer be called Mississippi Woman’s College, President Rouse suggested the name William Carey College in honor of the 18th century English Baptist missionary to India who became the father of modern missions; the new name was approved by the faculty and trustees. According to college historian Donna Duck Wheeler, Rouse meditated in the forest adjacent to the college, and there he felt inspired to name the school after the missionary. Thus, the college inherited the famous motto of William

Carey: "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God."¹⁷

Even before Mississippi Woman's College adopted its new name, the school began to prepare for male students, building a men's dormitory that opened in fall 1954. The administration knew that a quick way to bring in male students was by creating football, baseball, basketball, and track teams. Les De Vall, head coach of Hinds Junior College in Raymond, was hired as the football coach. Billy Crosby explained how he became a member of the football and baseball teams at Carey: President Rouse asked if he would be interested in playing for Mississippi Woman's College. Crosby said, "I could just see the headlines: 'The Skirts Lose Again.'" Nevertheless, Crosby and 35 other players showed up that fall at the newly renamed William Carey College. With the addition of male students, the total enrollment in fall 1954 was 315. The football team posted winning seasons in its only two years of competition, 1954 and 1955. Another victory occurred when Andy Tate, dean of men, led several of the football players to faith in Christ. These conversions sparked a revival in the men's dormitory, and over 100 male students made professions of faith. Some of the athletes became ministers. The prayers of Sue Bell Johnson were being answered.¹⁸

The 1950s were a time of remarkable growth for Mississippi Baptists. The state convention actively participated in evangelistic efforts organized by the SBC, such as simultaneous revivals promoted by the Home Mission Board in spring 1951 and the "Million More in '54" campaign promoted by the Sunday School Board. The simultaneous revivals were held in 19,000 Baptist churches east of the Mississippi River. Every church was encouraged to host a series of evangelistic meetings during the same two-week period, culminating in a live evangelistic radio broadcast on NBC on April 8, 1951. That year, Mississippi Baptists reported a record number of baptisms: 18,680. *The Baptist Record* encouraged participation in the effort to saturate communities with simultaneous gospel preaching, saying, "In union there is strength." The newspaper defined the campaign simply: "This is an effort to make it hard to be lost and easy to be saved." The "Million More in '54" campaign was a Southern Baptist program with a goal to enroll one million new members in Sunday school in 1954. E. C. Williams, director of the Mississippi Baptist Sunday School Department, and other Mississippi Baptist leaders urged church members to visit the unchurched in their communities and expand their Sunday school departments. Mis-

Mississippi Baptists promoted a simultaneous revival campaign again in 1959, and the second-highest number of baptisms for the decade was reported that year: 18,387, up over 1,000 from the previous year.¹⁹

Noting that the SBC had organized a Historical Commission in 1951, the MBC decided to follow suit. There had been a standing committee on Mississippi Baptist history and research from 1926 to 1937, and then in 1937, an informal Mississippi Baptist Historical Society was reorganized. In 1951, this group was formally recognized as an auxiliary to the MBC, and finally, in 1956, the state convention formally chartered the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission under the authority of the state convention. Baptist historian Jesse L. Boyd, who had led the society, served as the first director of the commission, which continued to preserve historical records in the Mississippi College library, encouraged churches and associations to store their materials in the archives, and promoted Baptist historical markers around the state.²⁰

When A. L. Goodrich died on March 14, 1956, he had served *The Baptist Record* as circulation manager and editor for over 21 years. Under his leadership, circulation had grown from 4,001 in 1935 to more than 89,000 in 1956. In June 1956, W. C. Fields became editor, followed by Joe T. Odle in September 1959. Under Odle, *The Baptist Record* boasted of having “the largest circulation of any newspaper of any kind in Mississippi,” with a circulation of 108,000 by 1970. The tremendous influence of this Mississippi Baptist journal was supported by the “every family plan,” through which 1,450 of the 1,881 churches affiliated with the state convention had the newspaper mailed to every family in their congregation for 15 cents per family.²¹

One of Chester Quarles’s dreams was the development of a facility for summer retreats for Mississippi Baptists. In 1950, the WMU invited the state convention to use Camp Garaywa for summer programs. In October 1955, the convention board purchased Camp Kittiwake in Pass Christian. The property included 16 acres, with cabins, classroom buildings, recreational facilities, and 675 feet of beachfront. The camp was popular; annual attendance grew from 1,962 in 1957 to 2,521 in 1959. An additional retreat on the Mississippi coast was purchased in 1959, when the state convention board acquired a property on Henderson Point in Pass Christian, the former site of the Marine Academy, from the U.S. government. Bap-

tists renamed the property Gulfshore Baptist Assembly. The assembly had sleeping accommodations for 380 people, a cafeteria, a large auditorium, classrooms, recreational facilities, and a beach. It immediately became a popular destination for Mississippi Baptists. In its first year of operation, Gulfshore Baptist Assembly registered approximately 3,600 guests and recorded 397 spiritual decisions. By 1969, attendance was around 13,000.²²

Disaster struck both coastal retreats in the 1960s. Hurricane Betsy arrived on September 9, 1965, and swept out most first-floor windows, doing an estimated \$250,000 in damage to furniture, equipment, and buildings at Gulfshore Assembly. Betsy did slight damage to Kittiwake. Four years later, on August 17, 1969, Hurricane Camille struck. The loss at both assemblies was almost total. All of the buildings at Kittiwake were swept away. Assemblies Manager Tom Douglas said Kittiwake looked “like a bulldozer had been run across it and swept the property clean.” At Gulfshore Assembly, the wall of water was a foot deep on the second floor of the main building; only four buildings were left standing, though they were severely damaged. *The Baptist Record* estimated that well over \$1 million in damage was done to the assemblies as well as over \$1 million in damage to Baptist churches along the coast.²³

In 1965, Dan C. Hall, director of the church music department, organized the Mississippi Singing Churchmen. This men’s chorus was comprised mostly of ministers of music in the state. They sang at several events in 1965, including the state evangelism conference in Tupelo. Soon it became a tradition for them to sing at the annual meeting of the state convention. Through the years, the Singing Churchmen’s concerts and mission trips have impacted thousands around the world; they are still active to the present day.²⁴

The growing pains of denominational organizations caused crowded conditions at the Baptist Building in Jackson. The 1956 state convention authorized the purchase of the Waddell property on the corner of North President and Mississippi streets for a new Baptist Building, at a cost of \$103,000. Construction was delayed, however, until 1966, when the old headquarters building was sold to the state of Mississippi for \$120,000. The new MBC building was officially opened on July 2, 1968. It was a fitting climax to the service of Quarles, who celebrated with 500 Baptists that day. Sadly, he died four days later. Soon after the building dedication, Quarles

left on a mission trip to Peru. He had a sudden heart attack while visiting Indian ruins near Cuzco on July 6, 1968. In the July 11, 1968, issue of *The Baptist Record*, the paper reported on the joyful beginning of the new Mississippi Baptist building and on the sad ending of the life of the Mississippi Baptist leader.²⁵

W. Douglas Hudgins, pastor of First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), preached at Quarles's funeral on July 11, as tributes to Quarles poured in from around the world."²⁶

Church life in the 1950s and 1960s

The affluence following World War II produced many new programs and practices in the Baptist churches of Mississippi. Many churches installed air conditioning in their buildings. Many also purchased a bus to transport church groups to events or provide transportation for people to Sunday services. In 1953, Paul Truitt Memorial Baptist Church, Pearl (Rankin), purchased a bus to reach "the entire span of the community." New staff positions were filled; in addition to pastor, many churches called a minister of music, minister of education, minister of youth, or a combination of these titles. West Jackson Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), illustrates many of the new programs that were introduced during this time. In addition to Sunday school classes in the morning before worship, in August 1950, West Jackson organized a Training Union that held classes before evening worship to educate members in subjects like church doctrine and church history. In 1951, the church began to print a weekly bulletin to distribute to worship attendees. By 1954, the Sunday school classes were organized into departments called Cradle Roll, Beginners, Primary, Juniors, Intermediate, Young People, and Adult. By 1959, West Jackson had grown to a membership of 892. At this point, the church had an office and phone, and it encouraged members to call the office instead of the pastor on Mondays. In 1961, the church began to print a weekly paper by mimeograph machine, and once a month they mailed the paper to members.²⁷

Although Baptist sanctuaries were often red brick with white columns in front, during this period, traditional church architecture was sometimes replaced with new, bold designs. Pace Baptist Church (Bolivar) is an in-

teresting example. The pastor of the church, J. D. Rice, had a degree in architecture from Texas A&M University; he used his talents to draw the blueprint for a new sanctuary, which was dedicated in January 1963. He designed a building with a high roof that rose at a sharp angle. Above the front doors was a window that rose to the roof, emphasizing the steep angle. A thin, needlelike steeple gave the building a sleek appearance.²⁸

The role of deacon was also changing. Previously, deacons were typically appointed for a lifetime and often made business decisions. Because of this, deacons held great power in their church. In 1959, it was the deacons of West Jackson who instructed their pastor to take a day off on Monday. In 1962, the deacons of First Baptist Church, Ocean Springs (Jackson), decided on different department heads, and the deacons oversaw a study about adding a new staff position. When members had a grievance against the pastor, they often presented their petition to the deacons. However, in the 1950s and 1960s, many churches began to have a rotating system of deacons. This meant that after serving as active deacons for a few years, they rotated off and became inactive, and new deacons were elected to replace them on the active deacon body. This system made deacons more accountable to the congregation because they had to be reelected by the church if they wanted to continue to serve. East Moss Point Baptist Church, Moss Point (Jackson), adopted the rotating system of deacons in 1951; Carthage Baptist Church, Carthage (Leake), in 1954; Trinity Baptist Church, Biloxi (Harrison), had a rotating system of deacons in place by 1959; West Jackson Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), adopted it in December 1964; and First Baptist Church, Clinton (Hinds), adopted the rotating system in April 1967.²⁹

Another major trend in church life was toward meeting every Sunday for worship. During the 20th century it became more common for churches to meet multiple times a month. Before World War II, most churches were still part-time, meeting once or twice a month for preaching, just as most Mississippi Baptist churches had always gathered. However, during the 1950s, a small majority of Mississippi Baptist churches became full-time, holding worship services every Sunday; this trend accelerated in the 1960s. It was common to read an announcement in *The Baptist Record* such as this one, on December 9, 1965: "Thaxton Church in Pontotoc County, a rural church of 114 resident members, took a great forward step to begin full-

time preaching services and calling Rev. Billy Ray Nelson of Greenville as pastor. Mr. Nelson accepted and preached his first pastoral sermon on Nov. 28.” Similarly, this entry, from October 10, 1968, stated: “Unity Church, Greene County, voted to have a full-time preaching ministry, according to Rev. David Perry, pastor. For almost four years, Mr. Perry has served both Leaf and Unity Churches. The every Sunday program will become effective on October 20.” The state convention reported an annual survey of how often churches met. In 1955, out of 1,734 Mississippi Baptist churches, 155 met “quarter-time” (once a month), 619 met “half-time” (twice a month), 24 met “three-fourths time” (three times a month), and 934 met “full-time” (every Sunday). By 1969, 79% (1,497 of 1,886) of the churches in the state were reported as full-time.³⁰

Mississippians began moving from the country to the city. In 1956, there were 1,366 Mississippi Baptist churches in the open country or a village, with a combined membership of 223,358 members, and there were only 385 churches in a town or city, with a combined membership of 213,154. By the end of the 1960s, the majority of Mississippi Baptist churches were still located in the country, but the majority of people had moved to town. In 1969, 1,377 churches were in the open country or a village, with a total membership of 230,682, while 504 town and city churches had 300,524 total members.³¹

The shift of the Baptist population in Mississippi was also toward the Gulf Coast. Calhoun Baptist Association and Zion Baptist Association, both located in north-central Mississippi, reported in 1951 that they had 50 and 31 churches and total memberships of 8,586 and 4,954 respectively. In the same year, Gulf Coast Baptist Association and Jackson County Baptist Association, both located on the Mississippi coast, reported 22 and 18 churches and total memberships of 7,224 and 5,516 respectively. The 1968 figures reveal the dramatic shift in population. Calhoun association still had 50 churches, but membership was down to 8,575, while Zion association had lost one church, and membership was down to 4,483. On the coast, the Gulf Coast association had more than doubled its churches, to 48, and almost tripled the membership, to 21,275, while Jackson County association had almost doubled the number of churches, to 35, and almost tripled the membership, to 15,131. Richard A. McLemore said, “Because of their very numerical strength, Baptists could literally control life in Mis-

Mississippi.”³²

Racism and the Civil Rights Movement

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court struck down public school segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education*, saying, “Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” The SBC, meeting only weeks later, became the first major religious denomination to endorse the decision, saying, “This Supreme Court decision is in harmony with the constitutional guarantee of equal freedom to all citizens, and with the Christian principles of equal justice and love for all men.” Mississippi Baptists, however, would have none of it. A. L. Goodrich, editor of *The Baptist Record*, accused the SBC of inconsistency on the issue for not endorsing other types of integration as well. Goodrich was “indignant” at this example of “the church putting its finger in state matters,” but he told Mississippi Baptist readers that they “need not fear any results from this action.” First Baptist Church, Grenada (Grenada), made a statement condemning the Supreme Court decision. The MBC, meeting November 16–18, 1954, passed several resolutions but made no mention of the Supreme Court decision.³³

The Supreme Court deferred application of integration, and Mississippi’s governor, Hugh White, met with Black leaders, expecting that they would agree to maintain segregated schools if the state improved funding for Black schools. H. H. Humes represented the largest Black denomination in the state, as president of the 400,000-member General Missionary Baptist State Convention of Mississippi. He responded to the governor, “The real trouble is that for too long you have given us schools in which we could study the earth through the floor and the stars through the roof.”³⁴

In the 1950s, most White Baptists were content with a paternalistic approach of sponsoring ministry to Black Baptists, while keeping their schools, churches, and social interaction segregated. There were some rare exceptions. Ken West recalls attending Gunnison Baptist Church (Bolivar) in the 1950s, when the congregation had several Black members, mostly women, who actively participated in WMU. However, most White Baptists agreed with W. Douglas Hudgins, pastor of First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), who told reporters that he did not expect “Negroes” to try to join his church. When pressed specifically about the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of the Supreme Court, Douglas evasively called it “a political

question and not a religious question.” Alex McKeigney, a deacon from First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), was more direct, saying that “the facts of history make it plain that the development of civilization and of Christianity itself has rested in the hands of the white race” and that support of school desegregation “is a direct contribution to the efforts of those groups advocating intermarriage between the races.” Dr. D. M. Nelson, president of Mississippi College, wrote a tract in support of segregation that was published by the White Citizens’ Council in 1954. In the tract, Nelson said that the purpose of integration was, in part, “to mongrelize the two dominant races of the South.” Baptist lay leader Owen Cooper recalled that during the 1950s, he avoided the moral issue, which later troubled him: “To be quite honest, I did not ask myself what Jesus Christ would have done had He been on earth at the time. I didn’t ask because I already knew the answer.”³⁵

In 1960, Baptist home missionary Victor M. Kaneubbe sparked controversy over segregated schools for another racial group in Mississippi: the American Indians. Kaneubbe was a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, who came to Mississippi to do mission work with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. However, since his wife was White, no public schools would admit their daughter, Vicki. The White schools denied Vicki because she was Choctaw, and the Choctaw schools denied her because she was White. Kaneubbe enlisted the support of many White Baptists, who campaigned for Vicki. This eventually led to the establishment of Choctaw Central High School on the Pearl River Reservation in Neshoba County, an integrated school that admitted students with partial Choctaw ancestry.³⁶

The minutes of Woodville Heights Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), illustrate how local churches began to struggle with the issue of integration in the 1960s. At the monthly business meeting of Woodville Heights in August 1961, the issue of racial integration came up. The minutes read, “Bro. Magee gave a short talk on integration attempts. Bro. Sullivan gave his opinion on this subject. Bro. Sullivan said he would contact Sheriff Gilfoy concerning the furnishing of a Deputy during our services.” Interestingly, the very next month, the pastor, Dr. Percy F. Herring, resigned, and so did one of the trustees, Samuel Norris. In his resignation letter, Herring did not make a direct reference to the integration issue, only saying, “My personal circumstances and the situation here in the community have combined to

bring me to the conclusion that I should submit my resignation as Pastor of this church.”³⁷

Woodville Heights was not alone in the struggle. Throughout the 1960s, many Mississippi Baptists wrestled with racism in their local churches, associations, and the state convention. In the early part of the decade, it was common for Southern Baptist churches in Mississippi to have what was called a “closed-door policy” against attendance by Black people. White Baptists were known to be active in the Ku Klux Klan, such as Sam Bowers, leader of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, who taught a men’s Sunday school class at a Baptist church in Jones County. Some Baptist leaders were disturbed by the violence of the KKK. In November 1964, a few months after the murders of civil rights workers in Neshoba County, Owen Cooper presented a resolution on racism at the state convention. Cooper’s resolution, which was adopted, recognized that “serious racial problems now beset our state,” and said, “We deplore every action of violence. ... We would urge all Baptists in the state to refrain from participating in or approval of any such acts of lawlessness.” In 1965, it was front-page news in *The Baptist Record* when First Baptist Church, Richmond, Virginia, admitted two Nigerian college students as members. When First Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, adopted an “open-door policy” toward all races the same year, it was again news in *The Baptist Record*. Clearly, it was not yet the norm in White Mississippi Baptist churches.³⁸

As the decade progressed, some Mississippi Baptists began to accept integration and work toward racial justice and reconciliation. Tom Landrum, a Baptist layman in Jones County, secretly spied on the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Landrum’s reports to the FBI were instrumental in the arrest of the Klansmen who killed civil rights leader Vernon Dahmer in 1965. Earl Kelly, in his presidential address in 1966, told the MBC that “the race question” had to be faced. Cooper took this challenge seriously, helping to charter and becoming chairman of Mississippi Action for Progress (MAP) on September 13, 1966; MAP was able to secure millions of dollars to keep alive Head Start programs, which primarily benefitted impoverished Black children, that were in danger of losing their funds. When Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in 1968, *The Baptist Record* quoted Baptist leaders who expressed “shock, grief, and dismay at the murder” of King. In 1969, Jerry Clower, the popular Mississippi entertainer and mem-

ber of First Baptist Church, Yazoo City (Yazoo), spoke out against racism at Baptist events. Clower confessed that as a child, he was taught that “a Negro did not have a soul, but he found out he was wrong when he became a Christian.” By 1969, all state colleges and hospitals had agreed to sign an assurance of compliance with racial integration.³⁹

To understand how integration happened in Mississippi Baptist institutions in the 1960s, one must understand the conflict between two key issues: the assurance of compliance with the Civil Rights Act versus religious liberty and the separation of church and state. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 required institutions to sign an assurance of compliance with the law, promising that they would not discriminate based on “race, color, or national origin.” If an institution did not sign, it could not receive federal funds. This meant students at Baptist colleges could not secure low-interest federal student loans and patients at Baptist hospitals could not get Medicare payments unless the institution signed the assurance. Baptists who supported segregation leaned on a fundamental Baptist distinctive to avoid compliance: religious liberty and the separation of church and state.

An incident on the Gulf Coast illustrates how segregationists sought to make the issue about religious freedom. In February 1965, Sergeant Fuller (no first name given), a soldier stationed at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, was invited to speak at a missions meeting at First Baptist Church, Ocean Springs (Jackson). However, he informed the church that he had been instructed by his superiors not to speak there “because it is segregated.” This became national news on February 20, 1965, when U.S. Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi accused the Defense Department of violating the First Amendment. The soldier, Eastland said, “was deprived of his right of free speech. The religious Association was deprived of their religious liberty. Freedom of assembly was likewise violated.” The very next day, the Jackson County Baptist Association received a new interpretation from the Pentagon, allowing the soldier to speak.⁴⁰

In 1965, the debate over integration heated up among Mississippi Southern Baptists. On March 11, 1965, the trustees of William Carey College became the first Mississippi Baptist institution to vote to sign the assurance of compliance. *The Baptist Record* reported that students at Mississippi College that year received \$207,050 in federal loans, while William Carey College students received \$72,965, Clarke College \$18,290, and Blue

Mountain College \$2,110. While the William Carey trustees voted to sign the pledge that spring, the other Baptist colleges either delayed or declined compliance that year. That fall, two female honors graduates of Hattiesburg's Rowan High School, Vermester Jackson and Linda Williams, enrolled at William Carey, becoming the first Black students at a Mississippi Baptist college. Years later, Vermester Jackson recalled, "It never occurred to me, the part I was playing in all this. Now, though, it's something I'm really proud of." Carey's president, J. Ralph Noonkester, realized the gravity of the moment. Someone burned a cross in front of the president's home. He said, "I don't think I've ever been as scared as I was the day that two young Black women enrolled." Yet after their enrollment, everything was peaceful. Joe H. Tuten, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), was a Carey trustee who voted to sign the assurance. Five years later, Tuten wrote that he signed it "knowing clearly that it would be the admission of Negro students. I did what I thought was wise, what I thought was good. ... But looking back ... oh! How I wish we had begun accepting Negro students twenty years ago."⁴¹

Like First Baptist Church, Ocean Springs, Baptist opponents of integration attempted to avoid accusations of racism by holding up the principle of religious liberty and separation of church and state. One week after *The Baptist Record* reported on the William Carey College compliance, the deacons of First Baptist Church, Grenada (Grenada), published a resolution in *The Baptist Record* opposing integration of any Baptist institutions. The resolution said, in part: "We are steadfastly and firmly opposed to the signing of any agreement [with the] ... Government that will place any restriction whatsoever on the control of our Baptist Schools, including any agreement or pact or promise relative to racial segregation or lack of segregation in any of our schools or other Baptist owned institutions; that we still believe in the complete separation of Church and State and fidelity to that time-honored and basic Baptist philosophy."⁴²

At the MBC in November 1965, Earl Kelly used his presidential address to discuss this issue. The minutes of the convention summarized the speech: "He stated that the paramount problem facing the convention was the principle of church and state. ... The question of the day was stated as whether the convention would accept the federal government's philosophy that there is no violation of the principle of separation of church and state

in the giving of economic aid to the secular functions of the church which are for the public good and use. He called for the messengers to bring the question out from behind the screen of anti-civil rights legislation and movements, stating that the convention had a responsibility to give boards of trustees some guidelines for the decisions which are their responsibility.”⁴³

Baptist supporters of integration also avoided directly addressing racism; instead, they based their support for compliance with the Civil Rights Act on another Southern Baptist distinctive: the trustee system. As the SBC grew, it moderated the strictly democratic church polity to a representative democracy by electing trustees to govern all of its institutions. To support the compliance assurances at Baptist colleges, Owen Cooper presented a resolution at the 1965 state convention which recognized that the assurance of compliance taken by William Carey College was like the one already taken by 31 of the 37 Baptist senior colleges in the SBC. Cooper’s resolution called on the state convention to leave the decision to the trustees of the colleges. Cooper was likely aware that internal discussions at the colleges was leaning heavily in favor of compliance; R. A. McLemore, president of Mississippi College, strongly advocated for signing but had not yet convinced his trustees. However, the resolution was tabled, and W. Douglas Hudgins made a motion that “any action by any institution for federal funds be held in abeyance” until a committee could be appointed “to study the entire church and state matter,” to report the following year. His motion carried, and an ad hoc committee was appointed, called the Church-State Study Committee.⁴⁴

The Church-State Study Committee that was elected in 1965 met at least a half-dozen times during 1966. On Tuesday, November 15, the day before the committee report, Earl Kelly said in his presidential address that “the race question” had to be faced. He continued, “For some time now, the race question has hung over this our Convention like a dense fog. ... Pompous prattle nor pious platitudes will never substitute for an honest and prayerful grappling with this question. Many actions of this Convention will only be interim actions until this issue is resolved.” However, when two resolutions were submitted to the Resolutions Committee instructing colleges to admit all qualified students “regardless of race or color,” the resolutions were rejected by the committee on the grounds that admissions policies

should be set by the trustees.⁴⁵

S. R. Woodson of Columbus, chairman of the Church-State Study Committee, brought the committee report to the state convention on Wednesday morning, November 16, 1966. The committee reaffirmed the Baptist principle of separation of church and state, but they saw “no violation of the principle” in government grants to individual students “as long as they do not carry any controls by government.” The report reminded messengers that Baptist institutions already accepted many government regulations and relationships, such as building codes and police protection. Without explicitly saying so, the report implied that the matter should be left up to the trustees of each institution. The messengers debated the report for hours and decided to continue in the afternoon. During the afternoon debate, a call for the previous question was defeated, and debate continued. Finally, the convention voted by secret ballot to adopt a substitute motion from Russell Bush of Columbia, a former convention president. Bush’s motion reaffirmed the principle of “a free church in a free state,” and added, “We suggest that our institutions not make application for nor accept any federal money.” Despite the earlier plea from convention president Kelly to face the issue, the convention had rejected the report of the Church-State Study Committee and substituted it with a suggestion.⁴⁶

Later that same afternoon, the Long-Range Committee on Christian Education gave a report, recognizing that “one of the most vexing problems before Mississippi Baptists is the question of government support. The debate continues without any unanimity of consensus.” Reports from the institutions pointed out how failure to sign the compliance pledge for racial integration was hurting them financially. Mississippi College reported that over 400 students could not get federal aid, and the college had to find aid for them from churches and individuals. The Baptist hospital in Jackson noted that it was unable to receive Medicare patients “since it has not signed compliance.”⁴⁷

By 1969, the trustees of all the colleges and the hospital decided to ignore the “suggestion” not to take federal money. On April 8, 1969, the trustees of Mississippi Baptist Hospital in Jackson voted to sign the assurance, opening the door to receive Medicare patients at the hospital. On September 25, 1969, trustees at Mississippi College voted, after heated debate, to sign the compliance pledge so that students could receive federal loans.⁴⁸

Merely signing documents did not get rid of racism in local churches. On April 13, 1969, Carson Baptist Church (Jefferson Davis) voted to protest the decision of Mississippi Baptist Hospital to sign the assurance of compliance. The church made public their displeasure by sending the resolution to *The Baptist Record*. The resolution based their opposition on separation of church and state and fear of government control. On the other hand, the deacons of University Baptist Church, Hattiesburg (Forrest), passed a resolution that was published in *The Baptist Record* on November 13, commending Mississippi College for signing, saying ministry should be “solely on the basis of God’s love for all men.” University Baptist Church pointed out that William Carey College had “led the way in the pursuit of this high ideal.”⁴⁹

The dispute was finally settled at the 1969 meeting of the MBC. It all came down to a ruling from the president of the convention, John McCall of Vicksburg. On Wednesday, November 12, Howard Aultman of Columbia reaffirmed the 1966 vote to “suggest” institutions refuse federal money, and Aultman made a motion that the state convention use stronger language, “by instructing our boards of trustees to carry out the request” and thus refuse government funds. After much debate, Dr. Lewis Nobles, the new president of Mississippi College, requested that the chair rule the motion “to instruct the trustees” out of order, since Article VI of the state convention constitution and Article VII of the Plan of Organization and Action gave the trustees final authority to operate the schools. McCall agreed and ruled the motion out of order. Dudley Wilson of Jackson moved that the convention vote to sustain the ruling of the chair, and McCall’s ruling was sustained by a standing vote. The editor of *The Baptist Record*, Joe T. Odle, called the decision “the best possible solution to this problem.” Odle noted that “while we are sure that some Baptists were not satisfied,” a “large majority” did not want to instruct the trustees in what to do, since the messengers “overwhelmingly” stood to support the ruling of the chair. Thus, the 1960s ended with the doors of Mississippi Baptist institutions open to people of all races.⁵⁰

Historian Randy J. Sparks, in his work *Religion in Mississippi*, said, “Churches of almost every denomination, black and white, served as battlefields where liberals and conservatives, moderates and extremists fought one another in the state’s greatest moral struggle of the twentieth centu-

ry. ... Out of this dialectic, an overarching consensus emerged among the state's majority, one that rejected once and for all the pernicious curse of Ham and recognized Black people and White people as equal in the sight of God, one that linked the democratic and religious principles of equality. ... The changes of the 1960s were far-reaching and lasting and were cause for some measure of optimism."⁵¹

Chapter 12

Convention Growth and the Conservative Resurgence

1970–1989

America in the 1970s witnessed continued struggles over social issues and a decline in the traditional American family structure, which many attributed to the rebellious 1960s. Divorce rates and the number of births outside of marriage rose sharply. In 1970, police killed two students at Jackson State University during an anti-war protest. In 1973, abortion was legalized by the Supreme Court's infamous decision, *Roe v. Wade*. President Richard Nixon resigned in disgrace due to the Watergate scandal. The same decade spawned a spiritual awakening among former hippies called the Jesus Movement. In 1972, Mississippi elected Bill Waller, an active member of First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), as governor. Waller was a moderate who rejected the politics of segregation and vetoed funding for the White supremacist Sovereignty Commission. Jimmy Carter, a self-proclaimed "born-again" Southern Baptist from Georgia, was elected president of the United States in 1976, causing the national news media, based in New York, to report on the beliefs and practices of Southern Baptists.¹ When President Carter was an overnight guest in the home of Mississippi Baptist leader Owen Cooper in 1977, the rare visit by a sitting president was covered by *The New York Times*, and NBC News covered Sunday services at First Baptist Church, Yazoo City, where Cooper was a deacon.²

Waller and Carter were moderate Democrats, but Mississippi began to

vote more for the Republican party, especially in the 1980s. In 1978, Thad Cochran became the first Republican from Mississippi to be elected to the U.S. Senate since 1881, and although Governor William Winter supported Carter's reelection, Republican Ronald Reagan carried the state (and the votes of most Southern Baptists in Mississippi) in the 1980 presidential election. The conservative values of the Reagan presidency were mirrored in a conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), beginning with the election of Adrian Rogers of Memphis, Tennessee, as president of the SBC in 1979. Reagan's support of the pro-life movement and other moral values endeared him to evangelical Christians in the 1980s. Conservative Christians like Jerry Falwell, leader of the Moral Majority, became more involved in politics than ever before. The focus of most Southern Baptists in the 1980s was not on religion getting into politics; rather, it was on politics getting into religion. Throughout the decade, a fierce controversy raged between conservatives and moderates for control, a controversy that nearly tore the denomination apart. While Mississippi Baptists participated on both sides, several Baptists in the Magnolia State played a key role in trying to make peace.³

Southern Baptist leaders from Mississippi

Mississippians were some of the most prominent leaders in the SBC in the 1970s and 1980s; among them were Grady C. Cothen, Brooks Wester, Roy Lee Honeycutt, Owen Cooper, Jerry Clower, Arthur Blessitt, Charles Pickering, Frank Pollard, and Landrum P. Leavell, II.

Poplarville native Grady C. Cothen, who had been president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, was elected president of the Baptist Sunday School Board in 1974, taking the place of Tylertown native James L. Sullivan. Cothen served until his retirement in 1984. Cothen was nominated as a moderate candidate for president of the SBC in 1984, but he lost to conservative Charles Stanley.⁴

Landrum P. Leavell, II, a Tennessee native and the son of former Mississippi Baptist leader Landrum P. Leavell and nephew of former New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS) president Roland Q. Leavell, was elected president of NOBTS in 1975. Leavell had served as pastor of



Owen Cooper.
*Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Baptist
Historical Commission.*

Mississippi Baptist churches in Pike County, Crosby, Charleston, and Gulfport.⁵ Brooks Wester, pastor of First Baptist Church of Hattiesburg, was active in the state convention and was elected chairman of the powerful Southern Baptist Executive Committee in 1978.⁶ Meridian native Duke K. McCall was president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for three decades beginning in 1951, and he was succeeded in 1982 by Grenada native Roy Lee Honeycutt.⁷

Owen Cooper, who had been an active leader in the Mississippi Baptist Convention (MBC) since the 1940s, became the most influential layman in the SBC in the 20th century. He served as chairman of the board of trustees at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary during the seminary's relocation, and on the Foreign Mission Board, where he worked with Clinton native Jerry Rankin to support indigenous missionaries in India. In 1959, he began serving on the Southern Baptist Executive Committee, a tenure that lasted 21 years. He was elected chairman of the SBC Executive Committee in 1971. Cooper was elected first vice president of the SBC in 1968, then elected president of the SBC in 1972; he served two years. Cooper was the first SBC president to live in Mississippi at the time he served. An advocate for lay involvement in missions, to date, another layperson has not been elected to serve as SBC president.⁸

Country storyteller and humorist Jerry Clower, a native of Liberty, was an active member of First Baptist Church, Yazoo City (Yazoo), in the 1970s

who had several gold records when he began to appear regularly on *Country Crossroads*, a country and western show sponsored by the Southern Baptist Radio and TV Commission heard on 405 radio stations across America. In 1972, Clower nominated his boss, Owen Cooper, as president of the SBC with the memorable words, “Now y’all know he didn’t come to town on no watermelon truck.”⁹

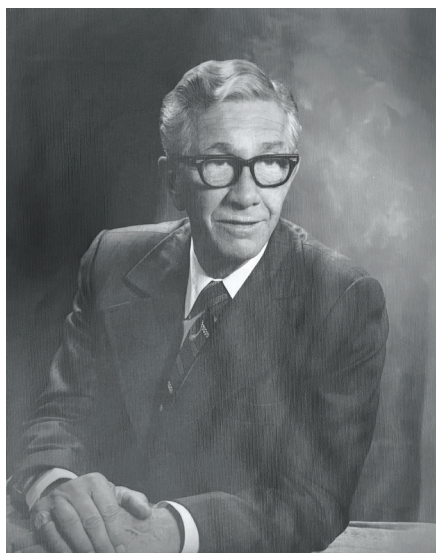
Another noteworthy Mississippi Baptist was Greenville native and former Mississippi College student Arthur Blessitt. For six months in 1970, Blessitt drew national news media attention when he carried a cross from California to Washington, D.C., preaching the gospel along the way, culminating in a “Jesus People” rally through the streets of the nation’s capital.¹⁰

Charles Pickering, a lawyer from Laurel and leader in the Mississippi Republican Party, was elected president of MBC and used that role to make peace among conservative and moderate Baptists in the state and in the SBC.¹¹

A native of Texas, Frank Pollard served two times as pastor of First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), from 1974 to 1980 and again from 1986 to 2002. In between those pastorates, he was president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary (GGBTS) in California. William O. Crews, who succeeded Pollard as president of GGBTS, said, “Frank was one of the most outstanding preachers I had the privilege of hearing.” In 1979, Pollard was selected by *Time* magazine as one of the seven leading Protestant preachers in America. He usually preached expository sermons on books of the Bible or great doctrines and themes of the Bible. Using his gift for memory, he wrote out his sermons and then preached without notes for a warm, natural delivery. He called his style “incarnational preaching,” a process of bringing God’s word to flesh. Beginning in 1976, Pollard began a 20-year stint as the weekly preacher on *The Baptist Hour*, a program heard on 400 radio stations across the country.¹²

Mississippi Baptists under W. Douglas Hudgins, 1969-1973

W. Douglas Hudgins was pastor of First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), and he was chairman of the executive committee of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) in July 1968 when Quarles died.



WD Hudgins.
*Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Baptist
Historical Commission.*

Soon after preaching at Quarles's funeral, Hudgins performed the duties of executive director on an interim basis, and A. L. Nelson was made interim treasurer. On January 21, 1969, Hudgins resigned from his church and accepted his election as the new executive secretary of the MBCB. Eventually taking on the full work of the position, his title became executive secretary-treasurer. Hudgins said that he had a "deep conviction that only God's leadership could have brought about my election as Executive Secretary."¹³

Hudgins avoided conflict over the Civil Rights Movement, referring to integration as "a school question or a political question, and not a religious question." He complained that minorities placed too many demands on the majority population. However, Hudgins did not oppose the trustees of Mississippi College in 1969 when they voted to sign the letter of assurance with the U.S. government to accept racial integration. Black students soon made up 12% of the student body at Mississippi College.¹⁴

Hudgins set forth his vision in his 1969 address to the MBC, a message he entitled, "Shaping the '70s." He was optimistic that technological advances would make people more productive, especially in health and science. He predicted that socially, emphasis would be placed on personal choice, and he forecast a backlash against the immorality of the 1960s. Foreshadowing the conservative undercurrents in the SBC that began in the 1970s and came to the surface in 1979, he predicted, "There may be in

the '70s sometime a congregational confrontation of beliefs.” Distancing himself somewhat from W. A. Criswell, the outspoken conservative pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, Hudgins qualified himself: “I’m not trying to be a Criswell—bless his heart.” Hudgins also prophesied that churches would need to change the way they do things: “The day of having a revival meeting and expecting a sinner to come has almost gone.” Yet he concluded, “Brethren, we do not fear, because our resources are not man-made, they are divine.”¹⁵

On June 29, 1971, Hudgins and the state convention celebrated the publication of *A History of Mississippi Baptists, 1780–1970*, written by Richard Aubrey McLemore, president emeritus of Mississippi College and the executive secretary of the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission, with assistance from two pastors, Earl Kelly and C. B. Hamlett, III. Kelly wrote one chapter, and Hamlett wrote two, while McLemore wrote the remaining eight chapters. This was the first published history of Southern Baptists in Mississippi since Jesse L. Boyd’s in 1930.¹⁶

The Hudgins administration was soon making history itself. “The computer is here to stay,” said Hudgins. He had a computerized system of book-keeping and mailing installed, which was new technology in the 1970s.¹⁷ In March 1971, Edwina Robinson retired as the executive secretary–treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist WMU, an office she held since 1944. Marjean Patterson became the new director.¹⁸ In October 1971, the state convention named Richard Brogan as the director of a new ministry to foster partnership between White and Black Baptists in Mississippi, called Cooperative Ministries with National Baptists because most Black Baptist congregations were affiliated with the National Baptist Convention. Brogan had a theology of redemption and respect with Black Baptists. He said, “I dream that this department will be able to construct the bridge called TRUST between these major denominations in Mississippi. ... National and Southern Baptists have substituted a painted smile and a cold handshake for the realities of a kindred spirit.”¹⁹

Work also expanded with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. In September 1972, the Baptist Indian Center was relocated from the town of Philadelphia to the Pearl River Choctaw Reservation to work with New Choctaw Baptist Association. The 13 churches and two missions in New Choctaw association were spread through multiple counties in central

Mississippi, focused on serving members of the Choctaw tribe; the association was affiliated with the MBC and the SBC. The Baptist Indian Center was jointly funded by the state convention and the SBC Home Mission Board. The new building contained offices, a kitchen, a reception area, and a large multipurpose area for meetings.²⁰

Mississippi Baptists had consistently given generous support to international missions, but 1972 was the first year that the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board trustees met in the state. The trustee meeting in Jackson, April 10–12, included a commissioning service on April 11 for 20 missionaries, including one couple from Mississippi. A crowd of 2,600 attended the commissioning, which was held in the Jackson Municipal Auditorium.²¹

Mississippi Baptists began two major construction projects during Hudgins's tenure. In May 1971, the MBC approved financing of \$30 million for a new 600-bed Baptist hospital to be built in Jackson across the street from the 468-bed facility it already owned. The groundbreaking for the hospital was held in December 1972, and the new building was finished and opened in January 1976 at a cost of \$35 million.²²

The other major construction project was the reconstruction of Gulfshore Baptist Assembly in Pass Christian. Despite the risk of hurricanes, *The Baptist Record* reported only "mild debate" about whether to relocate the assembly. The state convention voted at the annual meeting in November 1972 to authorize no less than \$1.2 million to rebuild the assembly at the same location. However, delays continued for several years. A contract to begin construction would not be awarded until 1976, under Hudgins's successor, Earl Kelly. A young pastor in Tupelo at the time, Jim Futral later recalled that a man from the state convention spoke at his church, urging them to put money in their budget to rebuild Gulfshore, promising, "This one is going to be hurricane proof." Futral stood up and said, "I don't think I would tell the Lord it will be hurricane proof."²³

Another expansion during the Hudgins years was the first group home of the Baptist Children's Village (BCV). The BCV opened its first satellite location in New Albany in June 1972. The acquisition and maintenance were sponsored by First Baptist Church, New Albany (Union), under the leadership of Rev. W. F. "Pete" Evans. This home continued in operation for 20 years and closed in 1992.²⁴

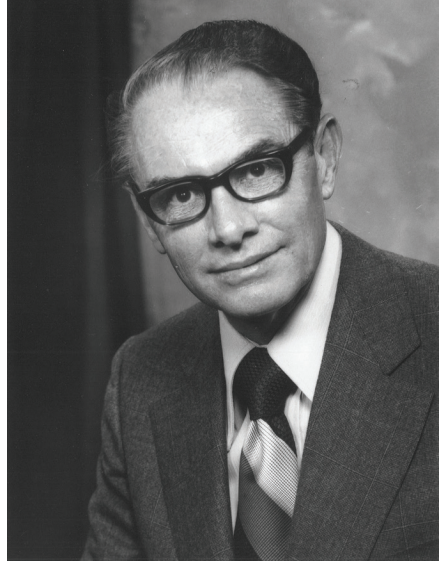
On May 22, 1972, Hudgins was hospitalized with an accelerated heart-beat. He recovered, but in April of the next year, Hudgins announced his retirement effective November 13, 1973. In 1977, he traveled to Japan to represent Southern Baptists at the 30th anniversary of the Japan Baptist Convention. Hudgins died on March 23, 1983.²⁵

Mississippi Baptists under Earl Kelly, 1973-1989

On July 5, 1973, the MBCB unanimously elected Ernest Earl Kelly, Jr., to succeed Hudgins as executive director-treasurer, effective November 14, 1973. Kelly was baptized and ordained by the Cherry Creek Baptist Church (Pontotoc), which was also the home church of J. B. Gambrell, the first executive of the state convention board nearly a century prior in 1885. Active in state convention affairs, Kelly was pastor of First Baptist Church, Holly Springs (Marshall), for 14 years and Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), for six years before his election as the executive of the MBCB.²⁶

In his keynote address at the 1974 state convention, Kelly quoted the prophet Joel: "Your young men shall see visions and your old men dream dreams" (Joel 2:28). Kelly prophesied, "The years 1975 to 1984 will be known as the decade of advance because Baptist churches will fire up other Baptist churches until the gospel covers Mississippi like the waters cover the sea. It will take a lot of dreaming and envisioning to do that, but we can do it if we will pray, plan and pay." Kelly recalled how prayer moved people to mission, from the days of Pentecost to the missionary William Carey until today. Kelly challenged Mississippi Baptists to make plans to rebuild Gulfshore Baptist Assembly, to open a new camp for boys, and to expand many other ministries.²⁷

As he continued his "Decade of Advance" speech, Kelly sounded a distinctly clearer note than his predecessor about race relations. He acknowledged that in the past, White Baptists had helped people of color in an "instructor-pupil" relationship, but he said that a new approach was needed. "We are moving from a paternalistic to a fraternalistic relationship," declared Kelly. He announced plans to give the Mississippi Baptist Seminary, which served Black Baptists, an independent status. Kelly also called for increased student work and called for plans to start 100 new missions



Earl Kelly.

*Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Baptist
Historical Commission.*

and churches by 1985, to reach a goal of 2,000 Mississippi Baptist churches. Calling on Baptists to give sacrificially of their finances and to encourage their young people to go into ministry, he quoted a popular rally cry: "Let's sing up, preach up, pray up, and pay up, but never give up, let up, back up, or shut up until the cause of Christ in every church is built up."²⁸

Much of Kelly's vision was realized during his administration. In July 1974, even before his speech, the state convention board had voted to purchase more than 300 acres of land in Attala County near Kosciusko for a Royal Ambassador camp, later named Central Hills Baptist Retreat. However, a financial shortfall in convention funds (largely blamed on high inflation in the 1970s) and the inability to sell Camp Kittiwake postponed the development of the property for several years. Central Hills finally opened in the summer of 1979, featuring a swimming pool, an 18-acre lake with canoes, an amphitheater, recreation field, horse barn with 13 horses, camp building, bathhouses, and 66 tent sites. Paul Harrell, director of the Mississippi Baptist Brotherhood, said plans for the construction of cottages were dependent on the sale of Camp Kittiwake, which did not occur until 1982.²⁹

There were also delays in the reconstruction of Gulfshore Baptist Assembly. In 1972, the state convention board voted to authorize at least \$1.2 million to rebuild the facility on the same coastal site in Pass Christian, but

construction took another six years. In December 1977, the board hired Frank Simmons, Jr., as director of the assembly. At last, the new Gulfshore Baptist Assembly was dedicated on May 5, 1978, nearly nine years after it was destroyed, before a crowd of 500 people. James L. Sullivan spoke at the dedication of the new retreat center, just as he had spoken at the dedication of the first one in 1960.³⁰

The Baptist Children's Village (BCV) expanded beyond the main campus in Jackson, building a network of group homes spread geographically around the state in the 1970s and 1980s. The first group home opened in 1972 in New Albany. A second group home, Farrow Manor Campus, opened in September 1975 in Tate County with two cottages, and it added another cottage in 1976. A third group home, named Our Town, was acquired in November 1979 at no cost; it was a failed childcare facility in Lincoln County that reopened as Dickerson Place in March 1980. The fourth was the former home of baseball legend J. H. "Dizzy" Dean and his wife, Patricia Nash Dean, in Stone County, which was donated to the BCV in 1979. The group home opened in June 1982 as Deanash. The fifth was a cottage that was constructed in 1984 by 10 Baptist churches and individuals in Yalobusha County, named Reedy Acres in honor of M. G. "Guy" Reedy, pastor of First Baptist Church, Water Valley (Yalobusha), whose leadership was key to the donation. The Yalobusha group constructed another cottage at Reedy Acres, which opened in 1986. The expansion of the BCV into a network of group homes helped increase the total number of children admitted to its care from 270 in 1970 to 531 in 1989.³¹

The leadership of Paul N. Nunnery, superintendent of BCV, was recognized in April 1973, when he was elected president of the Child Care Executives of Southern Baptists in April 1973. In December 1980, the trustees voted to rename the Jackson campus the India Nunnery campus in memory of Paul and Dorothy Nunnery's daughter, who was killed in an automobile accident on September 1, 1980, at age 18. In 1983, Paul Nunnery and the trustees decided to seek full accreditation by the National Association of Homes for Children. Accreditation required integration, and the BCV was the first such agency in the Deep South to receive the accreditation. Nunnery knew that the Children's Village was begun in 1897 for White children only, and he confessed that he and the trustees agonized about whether to apply for licensure, but they underestimated the willingness of

Mississippi Baptists to accept Black children. It “was never a real problem at all—we just misread the road signs,” said Nunnery. The first photos of Black teenagers appeared in the BCV yearbook in 1984.³²

Kelly realized that the BCV, as well as the Baptist colleges in Mississippi, needed a stronger financial endowment, so he encouraged a major endowment campaign. In 1984, the state convention hotly debated but finally approved a \$40 million campaign. Under the leadership of Harry Vickery, a businessman and member of First Baptist Church, Greenville (Washington), the campaign was such a success in reaching its goal that the 1987 state convention passed a resolution of appreciation to Vickery.³³

Kelly oversaw gradual administrative and personnel changes throughout his tenure, primarily aimed at efficiency and strengthening of missions. In 1974, Don McGregor was hired as associate editor of *The Baptist Record*, becoming editor two years later when Joe Odle retired. A minor restructuring in 1974, Kelly’s first year as executive, included the addition of a Church Minister Relations department to assist churches in finding personnel and to offer counseling to churches. From 1975 to 1978, the convention board gradually took responsibility for the salaries of Baptist Student Union directors at the public junior colleges in the state. In 1976, Kelly called for strengthening the smaller associations by consolidating some counties. He pointed out that with better transportation, it was no longer necessary to have associations cover small geographical areas. In 1978, innovations were made in the annual meeting of the MBC, including the reduction of lengthy reports and abbreviation of the meeting from three days to two.³⁴

The Southern Baptist campaign known as “Bold Mission Thrust” was launched in 1978. It set forth the goal “that every person in the world shall have the opportunity to hear the Gospel of Christ in the next twenty-five years.” To accomplish this, Southern Baptists set goals to increase the efforts of home and foreign missionaries, supplemented by thousands of lay volunteers. At its annual meeting, November 14–16, 1983, the MBC voted to increase its own giving to Southern Baptist causes through the Cooperative Program. Mississippi Baptists gave 34.5% of their budget to Southern Baptist causes in 1983, and the state convention voted to increase it to 35% the following year and to continue with annual increases, with a goal to give 37.5% by 1990.³⁵

Kelly promoted “Bold Mission Thrust” in Mississippi in five areas: prison ministry, volunteer missions, statewide simultaneous Sunday school enrollment, witness training events, and simultaneous revivals in Black and White churches, called “Good News, Mississippi,” in April 1979. On February 24, 1979, 312 women gathered at Camp Garaywa to pray for “Good News, Mississippi.” The gathering of women was roughly two-thirds Black women and one-third White women. As the women met in small groups, they found common ground. Martha Nelson from Pelahatchie, a Southern Baptist, said, “I was reminded how very much we have in common ... as we shared something of our spiritual pilgrimage.” Mamie Shields of Coffeeville, a National Baptist, said, “I must say that the retreat was wonderful! It will long be remembered as one of the rewarding moments of my life.”³⁶

As director of the Department of Cooperative Ministries with National Baptists, Richard “Dick” Brogan implemented Kelly’s plans to reach out to Black Baptists and start Black Baptist congregations. Brogan offered financial assistance to new Black congregations that affiliated with the MBC, including the supply of trailers as meeting places and funds to purchase property and construct permanent houses of worship. On January 1, 1984, Eddie Moss started the first Black Southern Baptist mission church in Mississippi: Christ Temple Baptist Church, Moss Point (Jackson). Rossie Francis was pastor of Faith Obedience Baptist Church, Biloxi (Harrison), the first Black congregation to be received into the fellowship of the MBC, in 1984. By 1990, 12 Black congregations had joined the MBC, geographically spread from the Gulf Coast to McComb, Greenville, and Tupelo. Some Black Baptist leaders resented the financial inducements that Black conventions could not match. David Matthews, president of the General Baptist State Convention of Mississippi, complained, “I had no one to give me funds for a church. I got where I am by years of sacrifices and commitment to the cause. Everything was not handed to me on a silver platter.”³⁷

Nevertheless, Kelly proved his promise to move from a “paternalistic to a fraternalistic relationship” by turning over control of the Mississippi Baptist Seminary to Black Baptists. In the 1940s, Black students were barred from Southern Baptist colleges and seminaries, so the Mississippi Baptist Seminary was opened in 1944, jointly funded by Southern Baptists and National Baptists, to provide theological education to Black ministers and laymen. It had a central campus on Lynch Street in Jackson and 23

extension centers around the state. During its history, the school had two Black presidents and three White presidents. On December 31, 1988, Dick Brogan turned over the presidency to Hickman Johnson, pastor of Farish Street Baptist Church in Jackson. Southern Baptists agreed to pay half of the building debt and then cease funding at the end of 1989. In announcing this action, Kelly noted that the doors were finally open for Black students at Southern Baptist colleges and seminaries. "The Mississippi Baptist Seminary was created to address a problem that no longer exists," said Kelly. The seminary continues to operate to this day under the control of the General Missionary Baptist State Convention of Mississippi.³⁸

Ministry to the Choctaws continued in the 1980s. Dolton Haggan, a Choctaw, served as the associational missionary of New Choctaw Baptist Association. Their poverty was reflected in pastor salaries: In 1980, the total salaries paid by the 12 Choctaw Baptist churches totaled just over \$10,000 a year combined. However, Choctaw Baptist churches had a membership of 1,280 in 1980, a significant percentage of approximately 5,000 members of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. Martha Haggan, missionary to the Choctaws and wife of Dolton Haggan, described how the American Indian culture combined with the faith of Choctaw Baptists. When a cult began holding meetings in the Choctaw community, the missionary was surprised by the nonchalant reaction of Choctaw Baptist leaders. The missionary fretted, asking, "What are we going to do?" The Choctaw leaders replied, "Nothing. Just leave them alone and they will soon be gone as fast as they came." They were right; the cult soon disappeared. Haggan also described how bad weather did not affect attendance at Choctaw Baptist meetings. They didn't even consider cancellation of a meeting due to rain. An elder explained, "The Lord knew about this meeting and the Lord planned the weather, so we have to accept it."³⁹

The emphasis on missions extended to many other groups. In 1980, a "Laser Thrust" campaign sought to start new ministries among Hispanic, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Deaf people on the Gulf Coast. Assisted by the Home Mission Board, ministers and experts in each group were brought in for a week of visiting the community, meeting leaders among each group, and conducting an "ingathering" to pursue new ministry. A year later they reported success among Hispanic, Korean, and Filipino language groups.⁴⁰

In 1981, Mississippi Baptists also entered a partnership with the Rio de la Plata region of South America (Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay) to send lay volunteers on mission trips. The partnership had to be put on hold for a time in 1982 when the United Kingdom and Argentina fought over British-controlled islands off the coast of Argentina. Ignacio Loredó, executive secretary of the Argentina Baptist Convention, preached at the MBC in November 1982, urging lay volunteers to come to his country, comparing the journey to that of Jonah across the seas. Mississippi responded; lay people went from Mississippi to Argentina to witness through a variety of approaches, including teams of teachers, basketball players, and choirs.⁴¹

In December 1988, Kelly announced his retirement as executive director of the MBCB, effective August 15, 1989. During his tenure, the state convention budget grew from \$5.2 million to \$20 million, Gulfshore Baptist Assembly was rebuilt, and Central Hills Baptist Retreat opened. Kelly initiated a \$40 million endowment campaign for the Baptist colleges and Baptist Children's Village, and several new ministry departments began. The churches of the MBC added over 100,000 members during his tenure, increasing from 570,644 in 1973 to 672,832 in 1989. Kelly said, "I will have completed 16 years of very rewarding service, for which I am indebted most of all to my Lord ... we Mississippi Baptists have made remarkable strides in our work." He gave credit to staff, board members, supportive pastors, and "literally thousands of dedicated laypersons without whom we could have done nothing."⁴²

Growth and controversy at the colleges

Blue Mountain College celebrated its centennial during the 1973–1974 school year with numerous programs, a financial development campaign, and a theatrical production. In the mid-1970s, the trustees discussed making the school coeducational but decided to continue to function primarily as a woman's college while maintaining off-campus coeducational courses and a program of ministerial education for male students, who numbered 42 by 1989. Blue Mountain maintained a stable enrollment throughout the 1970s and '80s of more than 300 students on campus and around 200 additional students in off-campus continuing education classes. Under the

leadership of Harold Fisher, who became president in 1965, Blue Mountain managed to avoid any major controversies during this period; it was a time of stability for the college.⁴³

Meanwhile, the 1970s were a time of expansion for Mississippi College. The trustees approved a school of business in April 1975, announced the opening of its law school in the fall of that year (after acquiring the Jackson School of Law), broke ground in December on a new building for the school of nursing, and, the following year, announced plans to build a new sports coliseum.⁴⁴

At first, the law school failed to receive accreditation from the American Bar Association, partly due to a lack of financial resources. In September 1978, the law school received a donation of property valued at \$5 million, the five-story former United Pipe Gas building located in downtown Jackson. This was a major boost to the school, and in 1980 the law school received accreditation. Internal strife, however, soon followed. At the 1982 MBC, Charles Wilbanks, an attorney from Corinth and former teacher at the law school, accused the school of serving liquor at student-faculty functions, said the professors were opposed to Baptist views, and said Mississippi College was so expensive that it had become “a little Ole Miss.” Richard Hurt, academic dean at the school of law, rebutted Wilbanks, saying it is difficult to monitor what adult graduate students do but that alcohol “has not been a part of any law school function.” The convention messengers declined Wilbanks’s motion for a fact-finding commission.⁴⁵

Clarke College had a high percentage of ministerial students. Former student Evelyn Williams remembers some students who were so eager to preach the gospel that they would climb trees on the square in downtown Newton and preach to passersby, warning them to turn to Christ. They also had a unique professor in Charles H. Melton, Jr., who came to Newton in 1962 as the part-time professor of religious education at Clarke College and part-time director of missions for the Newton Baptist Association. Although he became blind around age 17, he earned his seminary education by listening to his wife, Vera, read to him. Using his sharp memory and sense of hearing, he performed his jobs so well that many people were unaware he was blind. Melton continued to teach religious education at Clarke until his retirement in the early 1990s.⁴⁶

During this time, Clarke College and Mississippi College became em-

broiled in a struggle for Clarke's survival. S. L. Harris became president of Clarke in 1977; he resigned after only a year and a half, citing health and family issues. The MBC seized this opportunity to study the future of Clarke, and in fall 1980, the Clarke trustees unanimously proposed a merger of Clarke College with Mississippi College. A record crowd of 1,442 messengers attended the November 1980 meeting, and they engaged in an emotional debate that lasted most of the day. A substitute motion was made by Jimmy Walker of Ripley to keep the college open but to make it a senior college. The final speaker on the motion was Lowery Compere, former Clarke president, who pointed out that Baptist junior colleges usually survived when converted to senior colleges. However, the convention voted by a voice vote to merge the colleges.⁴⁷

This merger had unintended consequences. The Mississippi Baptist Education Commission distributed funds among the Baptist schools, but since Clarke was no longer considered a separate college, the separate funding for Clarke was cut off. Some felt the situation was unfair to Clarke, while others pointed out that William Carey College had a separate campus on the coast, yet Carey did not receive additional funding for that campus. The MBCB rebuffed an effort to restore funding to Clarke in 1986. The issue came to a head again at the November 1988 meeting of the state convention. Messengers voted 871-413 in favor of a motion by Mississippi College president Lewis Nobles to give \$200,000 in additional funding for the operation of the Clarke campus. However, the next month, at its post-convention meeting, the state convention board urged Mississippi College to close Clarke if enrollment didn't improve. That same month, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools put Clarke on probation due to a lack of institutional effectiveness, governance, and finance. In 1989, the convention approved a special \$115,095 line item for Clarke. Clarke entered the 1990s still on probation, with its future in doubt.⁴⁸

William Carey College also expanded during this time. In 1969, Carey crossed state lines and acquired the Mather School of Nursing in New Orleans. The college celebrated the opening of the new Thomas Administration Building in September 1974. Carey added a branch campus on the Gulf Coast on June 1, 1976, when the school purchased the former Gulf Coast Military Academy on 20 acres of beachfront property in Gulfport. In 1985, Carey announced plans to upgrade Carey on the Coast, adding 100

apartments to make it a full-time residential school.⁴⁹

In the late 1980s, trustees at Carey sharply divided over the leadership of the president, J. Ralph Noonkester. On May 6, 1988, Carey trustees met for five hours, part of the time behind closed doors, and approved belt-tightening changes in administration to improve cash flow. They demoted and terminated some staff, and they raised tuition. Since the college needed \$300,000 within a month, Noonkester promised to focus on fundraising and halt any building plans. On September 29, trustees voted 5-4 not to renew Noonkester's contract past his retirement age of 65 the following June. The four trustees in the minority walked out after the vote. The college faculty passed a resolution opposing the vote, but a student group formed to support the trustees.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, three trustees called for a special meeting in November. Several trustees who had been absent at the previous meeting attended, and this time the board voted 7-4 to rescind the forced retirement of Noonkester. Even as he declared, "I will remain in the presidency of William Carey College," financial problems continued, and bitterness remained. On May 11, 1989, Noonkester spoke at the Hattiesburg Kiwanis Club on the "real issue" behind the trustees' attempt to fire him the previous fall. "The primary reason for my firing was my decision to demote two administrators on grounds of incompetence." Contacted by *The Baptist Record* for a response, former vice president W. J. Ward said, "I think Noonkester's record speaks for itself. If there's anybody incompetent, it's him." Two weeks later Noonkester announced his retirement, effective June 10, when he turned 65, bringing his tenure of 33 years to a close.⁵¹

After Noonkester's retirement, the trustees of Carey named James W. Edwards as interim president. Edwards was a financial and educational consultant who had experience at several Baptist colleges and at the Southern Baptist Radio and TV Commission. After closed-door meetings with Carey trustees on June 26 and with the MBC Executive Committee on July 11, Edwards released a 56-page report from the Mississippi Baptist Education Commission. The report noted that the trustees had not been involved enough in the budget planning process, and the cash position of the college was critical and worsening. The trustees made several belt-tightening decisions, including a freeze on spending. On November 2, 1989, the trustees elected Edwards president of William Carey College.⁵²

Changing worship styles

Although typical worship services were still dominated by hymns and Southern gospel songs, the “Jesus people” movement introduced contemporary music to the church in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The 1967 youth folk musical, *Good News*, was the first of many such musicals sung by youth choirs. Beginning in 1970, the Mississippi Baptist Church Music Department sponsored a youth convention to feature youth choirs. A 350-voice youth choir performed *Now Hear It Again* at the 1970 convention. Throughout the 1970s, it became common for Baptist youth choirs to go on tour, singing contemporary music at other churches. In December 1971, First Baptist Church, Long Beach (Harrison), advertised in *The Baptist Record* that their youth choir would premiere *Love*, an hour-long youth musical composed by Otis Skillings. One of the most popular musicals, *Celebrate Life*, was published by Broadman Press, the Southern Baptist publishing house. In 1972, Plantersville Baptist Church, Plantersville (Lee), had one of the youngest choirs of children, ages 7 to 12, singing contemporary religious music on tour at churches in Mississippi and Alabama. Thousands of students were attracted to youth choirs each week in Mississippi Baptist churches, which contributed to the summer of 1973 being dubbed the “high-water mark” in youth choir ministry. One of the early groups popular among Mississippi Baptist youth was Truth, a hybrid between a college-aged choir and brass band, organized by Roger Breland from Mobile, Alabama. In 1971, Truth took the Mississippi Baptist Youth Night by storm and were invited back by popular demand in 1972.⁵³

In 1975, Broadman Press published a new edition of the Baptist Hymnal, which included some contemporary songs and spirituals in addition to traditional hymns. Dan Hall, director of the Church Music Department of the MBC, was one of the first to endorse the new hymnal. However, music styles became a divisive issue among Mississippi Baptists, as illustrated by months of debate in *The Baptist Record* in 1985. A letter in August 1985 complained that “Christian rock” music was “demonic.” Soon letters were published weekly, alternately defending and attacking Christian rock. The debate continued for months until Randy Weeks of Columbus wrote a letter to the editor in rhyme, asking: “To rock and roll/ must I sell my soul/ as some insinuate? ... For once more it seems/ humanity screams/ for answers

to save all their lives/ and we spend our days/ thinking up ways/ to criticize Christians who jive.”⁵⁴

Speaking in tongues, a practice common in Pentecostal churches, became a hotly debated issue among Baptists in the 1970s. *The Baptist Record* published a front-page article on January 27, 1972, by Dr. J. W. MacGorman of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary to explain speaking in tongues. The article called for a balance between not quenching the Spirit and not going into emotional excesses. By 1976, some 100 Southern Baptist churches identified as “charismatic,” and many reported “underground” tongues-speakers in churches that did not endorse the practice. On August 16, 1976, an editorial in *The Baptist Record* stated that most Baptists believed in the filling of the Holy Spirit, but “they do not believe there is a ‘gift’ called speaking in tongues, or that tongues is a sign of the ‘baptism of the Spirit.’” James L. Sullivan, serving as president of the SBC in 1977, said that he wasn’t excited about the charismatic movement, saying, “it comes and it goes away.” Indeed, the issue did fade from Mississippi Baptist life, as attention turned to other controversies.⁵⁵

Mississippi Baptists on social issues

When the Supreme Court handed down its infamous decision legalizing abortion, *Roe v. Wade*, Southern Baptists did not have a consensus opinion on the subject. The decision was front-page news in *The Baptist Record* on February 8, 1973. Letters to the editor on February 22 were both opposed to and supportive of the decision. Grayton Tubb, a medical doctor from Fulton, wrote against the ruling, saying that *Roe v. Wade* “runs counter to the teachings of Jesus Christ, namely, that each individual human being is important to God and has a right to live.” Amy Burkett, an attorney from Biloxi, wrote in support of the court decision. Citing Genesis 2:7, Burkett said, “I do not believe the embryo becomes a living being until it breathes the breath of life.” She added, “Why are men raising a hullabaloo over woman’s right to decide?” When the SBC met in Portland, Oregon, in June 1973, reporters grilled Owen Cooper, SBC president, about abortion. Cooper said that the Supreme Court had gone too far in permitting abortions almost on demand, but he did support the 1971 Southern Baptist

resolution that allowed for abortion in the cases of rape, incest, fetal deformity, and damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother. Forced to consider the matter, during the 1970s, Southern Baptists came to a more conservative consensus, which was reflected in a resolution at the 1980 SBC opposing abortion except “to save the life of the mother.” When the more conservative resolution passed, messengers erupted with cheers. SBC president Adrian Rogers admitted that Baptist views on the matter had evolved, describing Baptists as “johnny-come-latelys” to the abortion issue. In 1985, the MBC passed its first resolution on abortion, calling for a constitutional amendment to “prohibit abortion except to save the physical life of the mother.”⁵⁶

Another evolving issue among Mississippi Baptists was racial reconciliation. During the 1960s, the doors of Mississippi Baptist institutions opened to all races. In the 1970s, doors began to crack open in local churches and among individuals. Some of the early open-door policies were inclusive on the surface yet sounded reluctant at heart. On February 4, 1973, First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), voted to affirm its policy to admit to its services “all persons who sincerely desire to worship” but “it will not admit any persons or organized groups who come for the purpose of demonstrating, who seek to disrupt, or who seek publicity.” In September of that year, SBC president Owen Cooper hosted a dinner for fellow Mississippian L. Venchael Booth, president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC), during the PNBC annual convention in Jackson. Cooper admitted, “Twenty years ago, I wouldn’t have had a part in this.” He credited “the grace of God, the changes of time, and my family” with his change of opinion on race relations. Another example of this changing attitude was Woodville Heights Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), which sent its choir to sing at the anniversary celebration of the National Baptist Convention in 1978 over the objections of a minority in the church who didn’t want their choir attending a Black convention.⁵⁷

In 1981, civil rights leaders accused Clarksdale Baptist Church, Clarksdale (Coahoma), of racial discrimination in its private school, and they insisted that the school and perhaps the church should lose its tax-exempt status. The church denied the accusation, insisting it focused on religious teachings. A judge agreed to suspend the ruling against the school, thereby postponing the ruling against 29 other Christian private schools in Missis-

ssippi, 12 of which were facing charges of racial discrimination. Later, the judge agreed to deny tax-exempt status to private schools that could not demonstrate that they had a nondiscriminatory racial policy. The court case continued until 1984, when the Supreme Court backed the lower court ruling.⁵⁸

Ministry to Black Baptists and integration of Black people into predominantly White churches was first accepted in some of the college towns and on the Gulf Coast. One of the first churches to integrate in modern times was University Baptist Church, Hattiesburg (Forrest), which welcomed a student from Nigeria in the 1970s. In February 1975, Kezia Chogo, a student from Kenya at Mississippi University for Women, joined First Baptist Church, Columbus (Lowndes).⁵⁹

Mississippi Baptists were concerned about numerous other social issues in the 1970s and 1980s, especially pornography, alcohol, and gambling. At its annual meeting in November 1976, the MBC called for new laws on pornography, since the Mississippi Supreme Court had ruled that the state's laws were too broad. Nothing happened for a few years, but then Owen Cooper put together a team of seven lawyers who met from February to September 1982, working on draft legislation against pornography. They used models from Texas and Georgia and the 1973 Supreme Court case *Miller v. California* so that the legislation would stand up to court challenges. It was then given to several state legislators to present at the 1983 legislative session. *The Baptist Record* gave strong support to the lobbying effort. Several legislators told Cooper that pornography was not a problem in Mississippi. Cooper worked with Paul Jones, director of the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission, to prove to the legislators that it was. At the hearing, they presented to every representative a piece of obscenity that was purchased in his own district along with the sales receipts. One committee member who was previously against the bill said, "I've seen enough. We don't need to go any further. We need to pass this bill." The anti-pornography bill passed unanimously in both the House and Senate, and Governor William Winter signed it. The American Civil Liberties Union filed an injunction that held up the bill for two years, but in 1985, the federal court gave the bill back to the state and declared it a valid law.⁶⁰

Mississippi Baptists were less successful in their battles against alcohol

and gambling. In 1966, the Mississippi legislature allowed local option votes on alcohol for each county, so some counties became “wet,” allowing alcohol sales, while others remained “dry,” forbidding them. Yet even in dry counties, the liquor often flowed. Franklin County Baptist pastors held a news conference on May 23, 1978, calling for an investigation of bootlegging. Harold Anderson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Bude (Franklin), said there were 33 to 35 places in the county where alcohol could be purchased even though it was a dry county.⁶¹

Gambling was illegal on Mississippi soil and in Mississippi waters, but not in federal waters, three miles from the shoreline. Nathan Barber, pastor of First Baptist Church, Bay St. Louis (Hancock), spoke out against attempts in 1987 to circumvent the law with a gambling ship, the *Europa Star*, which cruised offshore for gambling purposes. Baptist opposition to casino ships held them at bay a little longer.⁶²

Mississippi Baptists respond to disasters and violence

Hardly a year passed without a natural disaster or fire destroying a church. Soon after Hurricane Camille in 1969, Southern Baptists began discussing a more efficient way to respond to disasters. The MBC put together a van with supplies in the 1970s and assigned the work to the Brotherhood Department. The “Easter Flood” of the Pearl River shut down the city of Jackson in April 1979. Some 15,000 residents had to be evacuated by Thursday, April 17, and downtown was cordoned off. The Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief van was on the scene, serving hot meals to 1,500 people. For weeks, volunteers met every Saturday to do repairs, and the convention board executive committee endorsed a statewide offering for churches to aid in flood relief.⁶³

The effective response to the Easter Flood caused Mississippi Baptists to give attention to their disaster relief ministry. The Brotherhood’s Disaster Relief Unit was parked on display at the state convention in November 1979 for visitors to tour. In the 1980s, the Home Mission Board distributed Southern Baptist donations to local disaster relief causes. When Hurricane Elena struck in September 1985, Mississippi Baptists were on the scene right away with disaster relief units, coordinating their work with the

American Red Cross. When a tornado struck Jones County on February 28, 1987, the Brotherhood Department was able to coordinate the arrival of 325 volunteers from 55 churches the next day, and a total of 1,000 relief workers were on site within a week. The state convention also supplied mobile chapels to churches so members could have a place to worship after a fire, such as the gas leak and explosion that destroyed the buildings of Priceville Baptist Church, Tupelo (Lee), in August 1985.⁶⁴

Mississippi Baptists were not immune to the rising tide of crime and violence in America.

On Easter Sunday, April 10, 1977, the packed morning worship service of First Baptist Church, Biloxi (Harrison), was interrupted by a man who entered with his dog and a gun while the service was being broadcast on live television. Pastor Frank Gunn had just begun his sermon, when the intruder, Ford Dawson, forced his way past an usher. Dawson walked toward the pulpit, shot his dog, and then turned the gun on himself and committed suicide. Mysteriously, the service went off the air just before the shooting, although neither the sound man nor station engineer turned off the transmission.⁶⁵

In January 1980, five armed gunmen robbed the congregation of Fort Bayou Baptist Church (Jackson) during their Sunday evening worship service. All five men were arrested within a month. In June 1989, Pastor Roy Clark of Lake Harbor Baptist Church, Brandon (Rankin), was shot by the estranged husband of a woman he had been counseling. The man came to Clark's home and shot him in the head. At the time of the shooting, no hope of recovery was given, but miraculously, he was up and walking within three days.⁶⁶

Mississippi Baptists saw God's work in the 1980 healing of J. W. Baker, pastor of Riverside Baptist Church, Monticello (Lawrence). In 1977, Baker, then a pastor in Florida, had a risky surgery for a brain aneurysm. He survived the surgery, much to the amazement of his surgeon, whom Baker said did not previously believe in God. After the surgery, Baker's vision was limited to a tiny spot, like looking through a straw, and he was paralyzed on his right side. In 1980, unable to pastor, he moved closer his daughter in Monticello. Riverside asked him to preach to their congregation of less than 10 people. Unable to read, he preached from memory. Riverside called him as pastor in May 1980, and in August his eyesight and strength

suddenly returned. He began to preach with renewed power, and in a year's time, 62 people had joined the church, 30 by profession of faith. "The Lord healed me," said Baker. "I know he has great plans for this church. My desire is to do whatever he wants me to do."⁶⁷

Mississippi Baptists and the conservative resurgence

The most contentious issue among Southern Baptists in this time was called "the conservative resurgence" or "the takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention," depending on one's perspective. At the time, most Baptists simply called it "the controversy." A conservative movement began in Texas and spread throughout the SBC in the 1960s and '70s. Dallas pastor W. A. Criswell grabbed headlines with his accusations of liberalism in Southern Baptist colleges and seminaries. Paige Patterson, president of Criswell Bible College in Dallas, and Paul Pressler, a judge in Houston, organized a grassroots campaign to elect a conservative president of the SBC, who would in turn make appointments that would give conservatives complete control of the boards of Southern Baptist agencies. The conservative movement gained steam, which coalesced in the election of Adrian Rogers of Memphis as president of the SBC in 1979. Prior to 1979, there were rarely any organized campaigns to elect a president of the SBC, but *The Baptist Record* noted that Rogers was elected "following an intense campaign on his behalf." Baptist newspaper editors listed "doctrinal debate" as the number one Baptist news story in the 1970s; the debate only intensified in the 1980s.⁶⁸

After the election of Adrian Rogers, a group of denominational leaders, often called "moderates," organized to oppose the conservative resurgence. The main debate was over whether the inerrancy of scripture was taught at Southern Baptist colleges and seminaries, but there was a checklist of other issues as well. Conservatives opposed women's ordination and abortion under every circumstance except to save the life of the mother. Conservatives supported school prayer and tuition tax credits for private schools, while moderates opposed such programs on the grounds of separation of church and state. Conservatives supported pastoral authority, while moderates emphasized lay leadership and the "priesthood of the be-

liever.” Moderates saw conservatives as a threat to the mission program of Southern Baptists, especially since the churches of several prominent conservative pastors gave a small percentage of their offerings to the Cooperative Program; Adrian Rogers even called the Cooperative Program a “golden calf.”⁶⁹

Sociologist Nancy Ammerman did a study that indicated that while Southern Baptists were generally conservative, they identified on a wide spectrum. Those who identified as fundamentalists were 11% of the SBC, fundamental conservatives were 22%, conservatives were 50%, moderate conservatives were 8%, and moderates were 9%. Thus, while conservatives had the advantage, whoever could capture the middle-of-the-road conservatives could win elections. The contested elections grew increasingly heated. Mississippi native Roy Honeycutt, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, called for a “holy war” against conservatives in 1984. The controversy drew a record attendance of 45,531 messengers to the SBC meeting in Dallas in 1985. In 1988, moderates fell just 692 votes short of winning, out of 32,436 votes cast. Conservatives continued to win every election in the 1980s, gradually taking control of the boards of Southern Baptist agencies.⁷⁰

The MBC attempted to remain above the fray in the denominational battle, but that was not always possible. Mississippi avoided the controversy between the two sides over the inerrancy of scripture that appeared in at least 10 states immediately after Rogers’s election. However, in 1984, messengers at the MBC debated a resolution on cooperation with Southern Baptist agencies. The resolution called on members to “desist from general accusations, name-calling, and unsupported condemnation.” Several amendments to the resolution were proposed and defeated, and finally the messengers removed wording from the resolution that called on members to “refrain from individual or organized efforts to impose an interpretation of scripture upon the Convention.” In 1987, Baptist reporter Tim Nicholas said, “Mississippi Baptists kept themselves above any of the controversy surrounding Southern Baptist denominational life as they conducted their annual meeting in Jackson.” At the end of the decade, a state convention resolution referred to the convention as “characterized by love and unity.” Nevertheless, certain Mississippi Baptists were involved on each side of the controversy, and certain others played a prominent role in trying to make

peace.⁷¹

The Southern Baptist Pastor's Conference, an annual meeting before the business meetings of the SBC, became a major platform for conservative speakers. Mississippi Baptist pastors began to ask for a similar kind of pastor's conference prior to the MBC, but the idea was rejected by a study committee in 1984. Undeterred, an unofficial pastor's conference met prior to the state convention in November 1985 at Van Winkle Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), invited by the pastor, Donnie Guy. Since "it was being perceived as sort of a separatist movement," leaders wanted to avoid that perception, and the MBC voted to officially endorse a pastor's conference meeting beginning the following year.⁷²

J. Gerald Harris, pastor of Colonial Heights Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), was a leader of a newly formed group of conservative activists in the state, calling itself the Mississippi Baptist Conservative Fellowship. Harris had been a speaker at the unofficial pastor's conference, and he held several meetings around the state in support of the conservative resurgence. In 1987, Harris was nominated for MBC president, but he placed third behind two candidates who were not publicly aligned with either side. In 1989, Harris became involved in a dispute over a nominee to represent Mississippi on the Home Mission Board. In a private letter to the committee chairman, Harris suggested a person for the board, and his nominee appeared in the report and was elected instead of the nominee of the Mississippi members of the committee on nominations. Committee members Dean Register and Eugene Simmons were incensed. "It stinks. It's just not right," said Simmons. "I don't like this kind of politics. It's disgusting," said Register. Harris protested, "I was not attempting to challenge any nominations I knew about."⁷³

Northminster Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), became identified with the liberal side of Baptist politics. The church hosted a scholarly conference on "Women in the Church" in February 1980, led by New Testament scholars Frank and Evelyn Stagg. The speakers emphasized that about 55 Southern Baptist women were ordained, nearly all to serve as chaplains rather than pastors of local churches. John Thomason, pastor of Northminster Baptist, was elected president of the Southern Baptist Alliance of Mississippi, an organization of churches opposed to the conservative resurgence, which held its first statewide meeting at Alta Woods Baptist Church,

Jackson (Hinds), in April 1988. At first, churches in the Southern Baptist Alliance remained aligned with the SBC. However, in August 1988, Bill Jenkins resigned as pastor of Bay Vista Baptist Church, Biloxi (Harrison), to start Alliance Baptist Church, Gulfport (Harrison), intended for people with the convictions of the Southern Baptist Alliance. Paul Jones, head of the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission, was an outspoken critic of conservative attempts to defund the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, a religious liberty organization that supported separation of church and state.⁷⁴

Many conservatives felt that *The Baptist Record*, with over 130,000 subscribers, used its influence to favor moderates. Editor Don McGregor published letters from various viewpoints on the controversy, but when a letter to the editor accused Southern Baptist schools of liberalism, the editor responded that he had written “without proof or specifics.” In 1987, McGregor was sharply critical of an attempt by new conservative trustees to fire Larry Baker, head of the SBC Christian Life Commission. Calling the 15-15 vote a “tragedy,” McGregor insisted that Baker “has done an excellent job.” In February 1988, McGregor wrote a long editorial entitled “What Next, Southern Baptists?” that angered conservative leaders. The editorial referred to the conservative resurgence as “the Southern Baptist takeover operation” and insisted, “The struggle is not between conservatives and liberals but between two groups of conservatives with varying ideologies.” He drew a connection between conservative leaders like Paul Pressler to political conservatives like U.S. Senator Jesse Helms and said the real issue was the growing connection between the religious right and political right, especially their opposition to the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, which supported separation of church and state. Pressler denied the charges and requested that *The Baptist Record* print, unedited, a long response, but McGregor declined, saying the newspaper’s policy forbade accepting any material without the right to edit.⁷⁵

Some of the most influential Mississippi Baptist leaders tried to avoid the controversy. Earl Kelly, executive secretary-treasurer of the state convention board, avoided public statements on the controversy, although he privately disagreed with conservatives on some issues, such as women’s ordination. On February 11, 1992, after his retirement, Kelly delivered an address on “Fundamentalism as I See It” to a banquet at Mississippi College.

He said, “I entered and left Mississippi College a fundamentalist.” He said that when he was a trustee at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, he supported the removal of liberal professors who questioned the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, he warned against the dangers of a narrow, judgmental spirit like the Pharisees of the New Testament, who often caused division, and cautioned that “historically, fundamentalists are not denominationally loyal.”⁷⁶

In the 1960s and ’70s, Owen Cooper was concerned that the Baptist colleges and seminaries were liberal. Kelly, who was a pastor at the time, disagreed with him, and Kelly convinced Cooper that the statement was not true. When the denominational controversy erupted years later, Cooper understood both sides; he told denominational leaders that conservatives “are not all bad. They’ve got some good ideas. We ought to hear them.” On May 9, 1985, Cooper cowrote with Lewis Drummond a guest opinion column in *The Baptist Record*, pleading with Southern Baptists to stop fighting and to pray instead for revival.⁷⁷

Frank Pollard considered the conservative resurgence to be a distraction from Bold Mission Thrust, the Southern Baptist mission emphasis that began in the 1970s. He said, “In 1979, we were about to convert the world with the gospel, and Southern Baptists got another agenda put on them.” Pollard was a Biblical conservative. He spoke at the national Conference on Biblical Inerrancy at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center in North Carolina in May 1987. Pollard said, “Lately I have learned that I am an inerrantist. ... A more critical issue is integrity, simply telling the truth about each other. I have not gotten involved in the political activity because I do not believe politics is the answer. Politics is our problem.”⁷⁸

Charles Pickering, a lawyer and member of First Baptist Church, Laurel (Jones), decided to take action to bring peace in the SBC, starting at home in Mississippi. Pickering was a veteran of political fights. As one of two Republican state senators in Mississippi, he had played a role as mediator when Mississippi supporters of Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan were at each other’s throats. Later, as president of the MBC, he was concerned when he saw some Mississippi Baptists dividing into two groups as well. Working with Kelly, Pickering invited leaders of the conservative and moderate camps to a cookout at his farm in February 1985. The day of dialogue and prayer “didn’t change people’s feelings on the issues, but it helped the

attitude in that state,” said Pickering. Conservatives complained that they were never asked to speak at the state convention. Soon after the cookout, it was announced that conservatives would be highlighted speakers at the next year’s meeting. Pickering wondered if something similar could work with the controversy in the SBC; he convened a meeting of 23 state convention presidents in St. Louis, Missouri, on April 11–12, 1985. The state convention presidents urged a toning down of the rhetoric in the controversy. Pickering said, “I hope there won’t be a split. We came together to promote healing so we can get about our tasks of missions and evangelism.”⁷⁹

When the SBC met in Dallas that June, a Peace Committee was elected to study the roots of division and propose solutions for reconciliation. Pickering was the only person from Mississippi on the 22-member committee. The committee gave a preliminary report in 1986 and a final report the next year. It found that conservative charges of liberal leanings in SBC institutions had substance, especially regarding such things as affirmation of the historicity of the miracles and authorship of the books of the Bible. It also said that both sides were guilty of political activities and “intemperate, inflammatory, and unguarded language.” While both conservatives and moderates were called to repentance, conservatives had won the “holy war.”⁸⁰

Chapter 13

Into the Twenty-First Century

1990–2019

As Mississippi Baptists concluded the 20th century and entered the 21st, they weathered dramatic changes in technology, politics, and culture. The nation entered the digital age of internet, email, and cell phones as society became more profane and tolerant of sexually explicit content and behavior. Democrat Bill Clinton, a Southern Baptist from Arkansas, was elected president in 1992, but most Mississippi Baptists opposed his politics and personal indiscretions. Mississippi elected its first Republican governor in modern times, Kirk Fordice, in 1991. Democrat Eric Clark, a member of First Baptist Church, Brandon (Rankin), was elected secretary of state in 1995; he would later serve as vice president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention (MBC) in 2006. In 1999, Ronnie Musgrove, a member of First Baptist Church, Batesville (Panola), was elected as the first Southern Baptist governor of the state in two decades. Musgrove would be the last Democrat governor for decades to come as Republicans took control of statewide offices. The decrease in racial discrimination and increase in the political power of Black people led to the election of over 800 Black people to local offices. Mississippi had more Black elected officials than any other state, although no Black person won a statewide office.¹

Mississippi Baptists were forced to adjust to changes in the economy, changes in the moral climate, and natural disasters. Cotton was no longer

king of the economy, as Mississippi became the number one exporter of catfish by the year 2000. Industry and gambling grew rapidly. Ingalls Shipbuilding (later known as Northrup Grumman) in Pascagoula became the number one employer in the state, with over 12,000 employees. Casino boat gambling came to the state in 1992, despite fierce opposition from Mississippi Baptists. Hurricane Katrina brought devastation, death, and economic disaster on August 29–30, 2005, destroying and damaging hundreds of Baptist-owned buildings.²

Mississippi was bypassed in the population shift toward the Sun Belt region of the United States; the slower growth in the Magnolia State caused it to lose one seat in the U.S. House of Representatives after the 2000 census. The 2010 census registered a 4% increase in Mississippi's population to 2,967,297 people. The Hispanic population nearly doubled in that decade, although Hispanics still made up only 2.7% of the population, while 37% were Black, and 59% were White. Mississippi continued to be one of the most religious states, and Baptists remained the largest denomination in the state by far, with over one million members. This Baptist dominance was reflected in politics: U.S. Senator Trent Lott was a member of First Baptist Church, Pascagoula (Jackson), and U.S. Senator Thad Cochran was a member of Northminster Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds). Charles Pickering, a member of First Baptist Church, Laurel (Jones), was nominated by President George W. Bush to the U.S. Court of Appeals, and Philip Gunn, a member of Morrison Heights Baptist Church, Clinton (Hinds), became Speaker of the Mississippi House in 2011.³

While Baptists were dominant and influential in the state, the MBC faced serious challenges during this period. Financially, the Great Recession of 2008 caused the denomination and churches to tighten their budgets. Culturally, Mississippi Baptists felt like moral outliers. Baptists opposed gambling, but casinos proliferated in the state. Baptists defended traditional marriage, but the Supreme Court struck it down. Baptists opposed abortion, but the courts made abortion legal.⁴

Southern Baptist leaders from Mississippi

Mississippians who figured prominently in leadership positions in the

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) during this time included Morris Chapman, Ed Young, Jerry Rankin, Greg Martin, Larry Cox, Michael W. Weeks, Ken Weathersby, and Rick Dunbar.

Morris Chapman, a native of Kosciusko, was elected president of the SBC in 1990, and two years later he became president of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee. During his tenure, the SBC reorganized and renamed many of its agencies to make them more streamlined; this included the change of the Foreign Mission Board's name to the International Mission Board and the merger of the Home Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission, and Radio and TV Commission into the newly created North American Mission Board. Chapman retired from the Executive Committee in 2010.⁵

Laurel native Ed Young was elected president of the SBC in 1992. Young said it was time "to put down the guns and go fishing again," referring to an end to the SBC controversy and return to evangelism.⁶

Jerry Rankin was elected president of the International Mission Board in 1993; he was born in Tupelo and grew up in Fulton and Clinton. Rankin presided over a conservative crackdown on missionaries who refused to sign the 2000 edition of *The Baptist Faith and Message*. Rankin gave missionaries a deadline to sign the confession of faith. He accepted the resignations and early retirement of some missionaries, and he presided over the firing of 13 more who refused to sign. Rankin retired in 2010; during his tenure, the board changed its focus from reaching countries to reaching "people groups." The International Mission Board also increased its missionary force from 4,000 to 5,500 while greatly expanding the use of volunteers.⁷

Several other Mississippians took leadership positions in the SBC. Greg Martin, pastor of Commission Road Baptist Church, Long Beach (Harrison), was elected chairman of the trustees of the North American Mission Board in 1996. Larry Cox was elected vice president of public relations and development at the International Mission Board in 2000. Cox had served as minister of education at First Baptist Church, Vicksburg (Warren), and as an assistant to the president of Mississippi College. Michael W. Weeks, a banker and deacon at First Baptist Church, Tupelo (Lee), was selected as director of the Southern Baptist Foundation in 2002. Jackson native Ken Weathersby was named vice president for convention advancement of the

SBC Executive Committee in 2013. He was the first Black man to hold such a position. Philip Gunn of Clinton was elected chairman of the trustees of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 2014. Rick Dunbar, an emergency medicine physician and member of First Baptist Church, Meridian (Lauderdale), was elected chairman of the trustees of the International Mission Board in 2017.⁸

Mississippi Baptists under Bill Causey, 1989-1998

On April 27, 1989, the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) elected William Watkins “Bill” Causey as executive director–treasurer. Causey took office on July 1, and after orientation under the retiring Earl Kelly, he took the helm on August 16, 1989. Causey was born in Greenville on May 17, 1931, and graduated from Greenville High School, Mississippi College, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Ordained by First Baptist Church, Greenville (Washington), he had ministry experience in many churches. He was pastor of a church in Kentucky while in seminary, then assistant pastor at Parkway Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), and pastor of Poplar Springs Drive Baptist Church, Meridian (Lauderdale). Finally he returned to be senior pastor of Parkway Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), in 1963, where he served 26 years. Causey served as president of the MBC from 1979-81 and as a trustee for Mississippi Baptist Medical Center and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Gene Dobbs, chairman of the search committee, stated that Causey was “theologically conservative” but not aligned with any political faction in the ongoing controversy within the SBC.⁹

Just as earlier executives had done soon after taking office, Causey led the executive committee to reorganize the state convention board’s staff. In February 1990, he announced a rearrangement of the administrative leadership with three major areas of work. Jennings Orr became director of business services, Chester Vaught became program director, and Causey himself supervised the remaining ministries. When Orr retired in 1996, he was replaced by Barri A. Shirley. Causey said these changes were made with a goal of “a better job done with less money.”¹⁰

Causey adopted the mission statement, “Helping to Bring Mississippi



Bill Causey.
Photo courtesy of Parkway Baptist Church,
Hinds County.

and the World to Jesus.” He called for Mississippi Baptists to “draw the line at the state line” and to seek to reach out to all people all over the state.¹¹ During his first year as head of the MBCB, Causey traveled to every corner of the state. In July 1990, Anne McWilliams asked him, “Are Mississippi Baptists immune to the SBC controversy?” He answered: “Not immune. But Mississippi Baptists are not easily stampeded. I am confident we can stay together as a family and to major on the main things—evangelism and missions.”¹²

Causey led Baptists during turbulent times. His confidence that Baptists could stay together was challenged throughout his tenure. In August 1990, two Baptist associations in the state, Clarke and Sunflower, passed almost identical resolutions accusing *The Baptist Record* and its editor, Don McGregor, of having a “biased position” in favor of moderates in the SBC controversy. McGregor announced his retirement as editor on September 6, effective at the end of the year. Two weeks later, McGregor joined the board of directors for the newly organized Associated Baptist Press (now Baptist News Global), which was controlled by moderates.¹³

In February 1991, Guy Henderson, the new editor of *The Baptist Record*, used one of his first editorials to beg moderate Southern Baptists not to start a new denomination. “I make a plea to this group to refrain from taking such a step. We don’t want to split asunder the SBC.” However, on

May 9–11, 1991, around 6,000 moderate Southern Baptists met in Atlanta to formally organize the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF). The coordinating council included four Mississippians: Tom Sims of Richton, Jean Bond of Starkville, Suzii Paynter of Jackson, and Joe Tuten, retired pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds). At once, they organized informational meetings around the state.¹⁴

Waynesboro physician W. W. Walley was elected state convention president in 1991 and said his hope was that Mississippi Baptists could “get back to basics and get involved in saving souls rather than bickering.” However, conservative Baptists in Mississippi refused to watch silently as moderates recruited members for the CBF. When Guy Henderson wrote favorably of the “air of freedom” that prevailed at the 1992 annual meeting of the CBF, he received pushback from several letters to the editor. In November 1992, a group of 60 Baptists formed the Mississippi Conservative Baptist Fellowship at a hotel in Jackson, led by John Allen, pastor of First Baptist Church, Richton (Perry). They threatened diverting funds away from *The Baptist Record* to the Baptist Children’s Village.¹⁵

During the Causey years, Mississippi Baptists continued to expand their ministries. The budget was adapted to fund ministry inside the state. Under Causey’s predecessor, Earl Kelly, each year the state convention board had forwarded an ever-increasing percentage of its Cooperative Program receipts to the SBC. This percentage reached 37% to Southern Baptist causes in 1991. The state convention board froze that amount at 37% the following year, keeping 63% inside the state rather than raising the percentage to the SBC. Budget chairman Larry Otis of Tupelo explained that it was necessary. “If we continue in this track, next year we would be asking to cut back on programs,” he said. Two attempts were made to amend the budget to continue to increase the percentage given to SBC causes, but both failed.¹⁶

One of the most successful events funded by the state convention board was the annual Baptist Youth Night, an evangelistic rally which always featured contemporary Christian music and a dynamic speaker. Youth Night became so popular that it outgrew the Mississippi Coliseum and was moved outdoors to Mississippi Memorial Stadium. On July 29, 1994, Youth Night experienced a record crowd of 19,000 who came to hear Point of Grace and other musicians sing, and 130 young people made public professions of faith. However, the event was canceled in 1995 by severe rain and

high winds from a tropical storm. In 1996, the event was moved indoors to the coliseum, with two sessions on Friday night and Saturday morning.¹⁷

Calvinism enjoyed a strong resurgence in the 1990s after two Calvinists were elected as seminary presidents: Al Mohler at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Danny Akin at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. However, Chuck Kelley, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, opposed strict Calvinism. The stage was set for conflict over the issue.¹⁸

In a guest opinion in *The Baptist Record* in January 1998, Thomas Atwood, pastor of First Baptist Church, Oxford (Lafayette), called for “tolerance, kindness, humility, and patience” among Baptists who were debating the “complex issue” of Calvinism. A few weeks later, a revival at Highland Baptist Church, Laurel (Jones), illustrated the debate: The revival, which continued for 31 consecutive nights in spring 1998, recorded 715 professions of faith and 328 baptisms. The revival preacher, William Blackburn of Arkansas, said that he believed most church members were lost, a message reminiscent of Tom Martin’s sermons in the 1890s. As a result of this emphasis, many who made decisions at Highland received baptism the second and third time. Cary F. Worthington, pastor of West Laurel Baptist Church, Laurel (Jones), wrote a guest opinion critical of rebaptism in March 1998. He said, “It is sad that in our quest to pad our numbers we have so cheapened [baptism’s] meaning. . . . We are fast heading to a point where manipulation is replacing trust in the sovereignty of God.”¹⁹

Several Mississippi Baptist ministries received new leadership late in Causey’s tenure. Guy Henderson, who had been editor of *The Baptist Record* since 1991, retired in 1996 and was replaced by William H. “Dusty” Perkins, who took over on July 1, 1996, and served until his retirement in 2023. In 1996, M. Kent Strum resigned as executive director of Mississippi Baptist Medical Center. In March 1997, Kurt Metzner was named president and chief executive officer of Mississippi Baptist Health Systems, Inc., the newly created parent company of Mississippi Baptist Medical Center. The new structure was created to include the new Healthplex at Mississippi College and future affiliations.²⁰

Throughout the SBC controversies in the early 1990s, Causey remained in the background, focusing on ministry. Causey did not need the stress;

he had survived a mild heart attack on December 5, 1990, followed by quadruple bypass surgery three days later.²¹ The SBC controversy began to gradually fade from the scene in the early 1990s, but a scandal at Mississippi College in 1993 was followed by an unexpected power struggle at Mississippi College in 1994. Causey allowed the trustees to handle the scandal but got directly involved in the subsequent power struggle.

Baptist colleges during the Causey years

The Mississippi College football team had won the Division II national championship in 1989, but in January 1993 the NCAA stripped the team of its national championship, accusing the college of violating the limitations on grants for student athletes.²² However, the football team scandal was dwarfed by the scandal that rocked Mississippi College on August 3, 1993. College trustees forced President Lewis Nobles, accused of embezzling more than \$3 million from the school, to resign after 25 years in office. Allegedly, some donors trusted Nobles enough to give money to him directly, but he secretly deposited it into an account under the college's name that only he controlled. The charges of embezzlement were shocking enough, but months later, *The Clarion-Ledger* reported in detail that the FBI was investigating Nobles's use of some of the money for sordid activities. Nobles was indicted in September 1994, accused of mail fraud, money laundering, income tax evasion, and violation of the Mann Act, which made it illegal to cause someone to cross state lines for immoral purposes. Nobles insisted that he was not guilty, and his family and friends found the accusations hard to believe. Nobles was highly regarded by his peers nationally, having been selected in 1986 by the Exxon Education Foundation as one of the 18 most effective college presidents in America. However, critics like former law school professor Charles Wilbanks said, "He had full and complete and absolute power."²³

The Nobles scandal took several more bizarre twists as it dragged out over the next two years. When Nobles did not appear at a pretrial hearing in Jackson on January 26, 1995, FBI agents arrested him around midnight at a hotel in San Francisco, where he was registered under an alias and had \$25,000 in cash with him. He collapsed and was taken to a hospital, then

later moved from San Francisco to a medical facility for federal prisoners in Springfield, Missouri. That fall, a federal judge ruled that he was finally competent to stand trial. On January 17, 1996, Nobles pled guilty to five counts of money laundering, mail fraud, and tax fraud, and he returned land and stocks to Mississippi College worth \$500,000. The other charges against him were not prosecuted. He said that his wife, Joy, had no knowledge of his crimes. The judge described Nobles as a “high-level thief” and told him that his supporters “need to understand that you were not what you purported to be.” Quoting Proverbs 22:1, the judge told Nobles, “A good name is more desirable than great riches. I assume you know more about that than anyone in this room.”²⁴

Mississippi College began to recover from the Nobles scandal under its interim president, Rory Lee, and under the leadership of its next president, Howell Todd, who was elected on March 15, 1994. Todd, a native of Tennessee, had been disciplined in the faith at North Oxford Baptist Church, Oxford (Lafayette), while working on his master’s degree at the University of Mississippi. This fresh start was interrupted by more controversy on September 22, 1994, when the board of trustees of Mississippi College voted to enlarge the board and to begin selecting 75% of their own trustees. This action made the college trustees a self-perpetuating board, no longer under the control of the MBC. In their publicity to the secular news media, the change was framed as being made to add racial and gender diversity to the board; however, board chairman Harry Vickery said the move was to “distance” the school from “denominational politics.” Vickery expressed “uneasiness” about Baptist politics being the reason to expand the size of the board from 15 to 24 members while only allowing the convention to select six trustees. Previously, all trustees were selected by the state convention. Vickery insisted that the move was not intended to move away from Baptist roots. However, in a prepared statement, Vickery said that their charter did not sufficiently protect the college from “outside influences” and “potential actions of various factions.” They did not inform the new president, Todd, until a few days prior to the vote, and trustees asked Todd not to take a position on the matter.²⁵

The move stunned the four pastors who were trustees as well as leaders of the state convention who were not told of the proposal to make the board self-perpetuating prior to the meeting. The four pastors, Jimmy Por-

ter of McComb, Gordon Sansing of Vicksburg, Frank Gunn of Biloxi, and Eddie Hamilton of Jackson, issued a minority report. These trustees called the action of the majority of trustees a “violation of Baptist polity” and said the “process of trusteeship was violated.” The next day, September 23, the state convention board held a special meeting for four hours. The board confirmed that neither board executive Bill Causey nor convention president Rex Yancey knew of the trustees’ plans.²⁶

A furor erupted. Some made threats of court action and of withholding the \$2 million in funding that the state convention gave to the college annually. A week after the first state convention board meeting, on September 30, the Mississippi Baptist Christian Education Commission met in a special session to discuss the Mississippi College trustee action. Although they felt the move by the trustees sent “a message of alienation,” they offered an olive branch, expressing their willingness to seek a resolution. For the next three weeks, Causey and other Mississippi Baptist leaders met privately with college trustees, trying to negotiate a solution. Eventually, both sides agreed to a system of checks and balances. On October 20, *The Baptist Record* proclaimed in a headline, “The divorce is off.”²⁷

In a compromise that saved the school from seceding from the denomination, Baptist leaders and college trustees agreed that both sides had to approve the names of all future trustees. The board still expanded from 15 to 24, with up to a third of those in church-related vocations, and they decided that college alumni living out of state could be nominated. However, the key to the agreement was that both the college trustees and the state convention nominating committee had to agree on a potential trustee before the name could be presented to the MBC for a vote. The trustees agreed to keep the school under the umbrella of the state convention with the new arrangement. The annual meeting of the convention was only two weeks away, and the messengers would have to agree to the compromise.²⁸

The MBC met November 1–2, 1994; some messengers were unhappy with the compromise. During the Tuesday afternoon session, messengers made motions to reduce funding to the college or to escrow the \$2 million in funding until the former trustee system was restored. As debate went back and forth, messengers made motions, substitute motions, and even a substitute to the substitute motions. Debate was tabled until Wednesday.

On Wednesday, the majority voted to accept the compromise, and, by a vote of 645 to 379, they authorized a study by legal counsel of how the other institutions were governed “to ensure that actions similar to those taken by the trustees of Mississippi College be averted in the future.” They also passed a resolution expressing “discontent” and “disapproval” of how the Mississippi College trustees had acted and another of appreciation to the college trustees and Baptist leadership “for their conciliatory efforts in seeking to resolve the conflict.” Thus, while reprimanding the trustees for trying to secede, the convention messengers grudgingly accepted the compromise as their best option.²⁹

The compromise between Mississippi College and the MBC was unique in Baptist history. While Baptist colleges like Baylor University in Texas, Ouachita Baptist University in Arkansas, Samford University in Alabama, and Furman University in South Carolina have changed their charters to secede from their state conventions, Mississippi College returned to the fold. Participants in the negotiations gave credit to chairman Harry Vickery and his trustees for an openness to negotiate, and they gave praise to Causey, executive director–treasurer of the MBCB. Guy Henderson, editor of *The Baptist Record*, celebrated Causey’s role. “This was a brilliant move, enabling both sides to enjoy a win-win situation,” said Henderson. Both Howell Todd, Mississippi College president, and convention board president Jim Futral used the phrase “untiring efforts” to describe Causey’s involvement in the compromise. Causey revealed how he entered the talks with a positive attitude built on trust, saying, “The starting point of negotiations is that you’re dealing with good people who have the larger view of the work of the Lord.”³⁰

Trustees at William Carey College reacted to the controversy by voting to affirm their commitment to their traditional relationship with the state convention. Despite these signs of loyalty, some Baptists still worried that trustees of other Baptist institutions might make their boards self-perpetuating. “We can’t sit and wait to see what happens,” said Causey. Two years after the Mississippi College compromise, Causey announced, “We have found a way to bind them to us and still follow the law.” On October 14, 1996, he shared the solution with the MBCB: a covenant of cooperation. Causey proposed entering a covenant with the trustees of each institution; the trustees would pledge to continue to run the institution as a Christian

entity with a mission to share the gospel of Christ. In return, the trustees would be allowed to make nominations to the board of trustees jointly with the state convention nominating committee.³¹

Trustees at the Mississippi Baptist Medical Center and the Baptist Children's Village quickly endorsed Causey's proposal of the covenant relationship. However, some Mississippi Baptists did not feel it was binding enough. When the 1996 state convention met on October 29–30, the covenant of cooperation was presented by Causey. Johnny Sykes of McComb made a substitute motion "that the MBC reserve the executive right to appoint all trustees" of Mississippi Baptist institutions. However, his substitute motion was defeated, and the covenant of cooperation was approved. A messenger asked how binding the covenant was, and Causey replied, "As binding as the character of the heads of our institutions and their trustees."³²

Todd, Mississippi College president, was able to move beyond the controversy; he led a successful capital campaign that raised over \$88 million by 1998. This allowed for major campus improvements to modernize the campus and make it more attractive to incoming students, including constructing the Baptist Healthplex in partnership with Mississippi Baptist Medical Center and new dormitories and academic buildings. To focus more on academics, Todd moved the athletic program from Division II to Division III. He also began to refer to the school as a "university," although he showed no interest in changing the name of the school.³³

William Carey College trustees made James W. "Jim" Edwards president on November 2, 1989. He was previously head of a firm that dealt with educational and financial consulting. Edwards's expert ability was needed to solve the critical cash problems the college was having. In 1993, Carey was able to take advantage of lower interest rates to refinance the \$8 million debt, which lowered monthly payments and alleviated cash flow. By 1995, enrollment set a record of 2,073, including 614 students at Carey on the Coast and 369 at the nursing school in New Orleans. The largest gift in the history of Carey was made in December 1996, when Angela and Bill Hudson of Lumberton, owners of Hudson's Salvage, Inc., donated their 14,000-square-foot home and adjoining 300 acres, known as Pecan Shadows, which was valued at \$1.5 million, to the college.³⁴

Edwards's title was changed to chancellor, and Rory Lee, vice president for institutional development at Mississippi College, was hired as president

on February 23, 1996. Lee had experience as interim president after Nobles resigned. However, Lee served barely a year; he resigned to take the presidency of Louisiana College in spring 1997, thus escaping the controversy that was about to erupt at Carey. The U.S. Attorney's Office found that Edwards had falsely represented the college's academic programs on a grant application to the Department of Education. Edwards was put on administrative leave by trustees on September 17, and he resigned on October 6. Larry Kennedy was made interim president.³⁵

Clarke College, Mississippi Baptists' junior college in Newton, finally lost its long struggle to survive in 1992. On April 5, 1991, Clarke lost its accreditation appeal from the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. The college tried to fight the issue in court, and it received a \$120,000 bequest from the estate of Ruth Lacy in early 1992 to replace student financial aid that was lost. Clarke worked out arrangements with 16 colleges in Mississippi and nearby states to allow the remaining 105 students, a third of them ministerial students, to transfer credit. But in the end, the decline in enrollment, dwindling finances, and loss of accreditation were too much, and the trustees voted at the March meeting to close the doors at the end of the 1992 spring semester.³⁶

Nelson Crozier, pastor of First Baptist Church of Sharon, Laurel (Jones), led a last-ditch effort at the state convention on November 10, 1992, to force a reopening of Clarke and a restoration of its funding. Debate ensued for nearly an hour. By a vote of 852 to 447, the effort was defeated. The Mississippi Department of Health agreed to buy the Clarke College campus for \$1 million, to be used as a residential facility for adults 35 years and older with special needs. The purchase was completed in July 1997, 90 years after the college opened. A Clarke College Alumni Center was dedicated on the former campus on August 3, 1996, and it continues to be a tribute to the school's impact through the years.³⁷

Blue Mountain College remained remarkably stable during this time, as it had throughout its history. On-campus enrollment remained steady at more than 300 until around 1990, when new programs aided an enrollment increase to more than 400 by 2000. Under President Harold Fisher's leadership, Blue Mountain added a medical technology program, night and weekend classes for adult education, and a church-related vocations emphasis that included 59 male students by 2000.³⁸

Social issues during the Causey years

Mississippi Baptists were involved in numerous social issues during the tenure of Bill Causey. Paul Griffin Jones, who had been executive director–treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission since 1982, led state Baptists in addressing these issues.³⁹

The patchwork of Mississippi counties that were wet or dry led to battles all over the state. Baptists opposed alcohol sales, often working in cooperation with other church groups. They won some battles and lost others. In fall 1991, beer sales were approved in Rankin County, but hard liquor was defeated in a vote the following year. Liquor was approved in 1992 in the part of Lamar County that fell within the city of Hattiesburg, while the rest of the county remained dry. Quitman County defeated beer and light wine sales that same year. In fall 1995, voters again rejected liquor sales in Rankin County and Pearl River County. The Christian Action Commission supplied resources and strategic consultation to associations and churches in anti-alcohol efforts throughout this time, but in later decades, issues other than alcohol tended to receive more focus.⁴⁰

Gambling was illegal on Mississippi soil and in Mississippi waters, but in 1989 lawmakers approved casino boats docked on the Gulf Coast by using a tactic called “the walk.” Pro-gambling senators convinced senators who were reluctant to vote for gambling to simply remain absent for the vote. Paul Jones said, “I’m really disappointed that for something like this, almost a quarter of the Senate decided to take a walk.” On Good Friday, the House approved the bill, again with many representatives taking a walk. In 1990, legislators used another political tactic to pass dockside riverboat gambling on the Mississippi River by removing language, at the last minute, about boats being “underway” on the water and then forcing a quick vote. When the vote was over, most senators were unaware they had just approved dockside riverboat gambling.⁴¹ Baptists continued to oppose the spread of casinos. Developers of a proposed casino near Gulfshore Baptist Assembly withdrew their state application in June 1994 following months of intense opposition from locals and Mississippi Baptists.⁴²

As casinos became part of the Mississippi landscape, Baptists were faced with ethical decisions about how to relate to them. Baptist Memorial Health Care System of Memphis signed a contract with Grand Casino in

Tunica County in 1996 to provide healthcare for its employees at its branch hospital in DeSoto County, a decision that Paul Jones of the Christian Action Commission criticized as “regrettable and offensive.”⁴³

John Landrum, pastor of Popp’s Ferry Baptist Church, Biloxi (Harrison), was also opposed the legalization of casinos, but after they were legalized, he took an innovative approach. In 1993, Landrum felt a call from God to be a chaplain to the 10,000 casino employees on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. He welcomed people of all denominations to Bible studies and worship services. Years later, his work was still going strong. “Many of them love the Lord and want to fellowship with other Christians, but ... tend to pull back from church involvement because of the hours they work,” said Landrum. “There are Catholics, Baptists, Assemblies of God ... and include everything from a beverage server to an assistant casino manager.” He reminded his critics that Jesus always started with a person where that person was.⁴⁴

Although the ban in the state constitution against a state lottery was removed by voters in a close referendum in 1992, a state-run lottery could not be established without a vote of the state legislature. Baptist pressure, led by Jones, executive of the Christian Action Committee, convinced legislators to vote the way their district had voted on the lottery referendum, thus defeating the measure and keeping a lottery out of the state for nearly two more decades.⁴⁵

Public schools in Mississippi had welcomed prayers and devotionals for years, especially when led by students. But in December 1994, Lisa Herdahl, the mother of five children at North Pontotoc Attendance Center in Ecu, filed a lawsuit against the school to stop student-led devotionals over the loudspeaker, saying her children were stigmatized for not taking part. Jerry L. Horton, superintendent of Pontotoc County Schools and a member of Ecu Baptist Church, Ecu (Pontotoc), defended the practice. The lawsuit sparked a national debate over school prayer. The American Civil Liberties Union supported Herdahl, while the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission and Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission supported Horton and the school. In January 1995, new congressman Roger Wicker spoke in favor of school prayer at a rally attended by 3,500. In April, Mississippi federal judge Neil Biggers ruled that the school wrongly promoted religion and ordered a halt to the prayers over the intercom, but he allowed students to gather in the gym instead. Horton said, “We may not like the

court decision, but we will obey it.” A final ruling in June 1996 from Judge Biggers also halted prayers before going to lunch and dropped Bible history courses in Pontotoc schools. He ruled that these practices were a violation of the establishment clause of the First Amendment.⁴⁶

Southern Baptists in the Magnolia State made strides in race relations during this time. The SBC passed a resolution on its 150th anniversary in 1995 repenting of past racism and asking for forgiveness. Mississippi Baptists were already putting this attitude into action. In December 1993, 125 volunteers—70% of them Southern Baptists—raised a new sanctuary for a Black congregation: Springhill Freewill Baptist Church (Amite). Months before, three young men had been arrested and jailed for burning down the Springhill sanctuary in a racially motivated attack.⁴⁷

Mississippi Baptists gave strong support to “True Love Waits,” an effort to encourage youth to make pledges of sexual chastity until marriage. A “True Love Waits” rally in April 1997 at First Baptist Church, Long Beach (Harrison), was attended by 750 youth and sponsors.⁴⁸

Changing worship in Mississippi Baptist churches

Because of the rapid changes in worship styles beginning in the 1980s, the 1975 Baptist Hymnal had fallen into disuse, and a new hymnal was published in 1991 that included more contemporary songs. To mark its release, Graham Smith of the Mississippi Baptist Church Music Department organized “PraiSing” events the week of October 7–11 in Tupelo, Grenada, Biloxi, Hattiesburg, and Jackson. Smith was concerned about the struggles that were developing between contemporary versus traditional styles of music, cautioning against a focus on musical preferences. “Rather the question ‘does this music bring glory to our Lord?’ should always be the bottom line,” he wrote in a newsletter in 1992.⁴⁹

In 1996, the SBC’s Church Music Department hosted a “Common Ground” Worship Conference at First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), to celebrate “things we have in common” rather than engaging in “worship wars” over preferences of style. In the decades that followed, many Southern Baptist churches implemented new styles of music, changing the roles and job descriptions of many church music leaders. Graham Smith wanted

to use music to unite Baptists rather than divide them. He organized mass choirs of 2,200 and 2,800 voices that performed the contemporary musicals “God with Us” in 1998 and “God for Us” in 2000, respectively. He said of the second worship event, “Once again the uniting force of the Holy Spirit took over as we came together to lift up the all-powerful and only Name worthy of our praise—Jesus!”⁵⁰

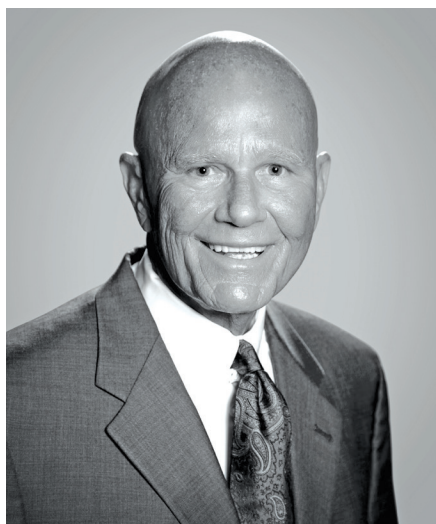
The many changes in worship were frustrating for some, as illustrated by a 1993 letter to the editor that complained of “loud music.” Graham Smith recalls reading a complaint “that the rage for novelties in singing has been driving out the use of the old precious, standard hymns.” Then Smith revealed that those words were written in 1892. Smith commented, “After reading the quotation, I sat down, took a deep breath, and lost most of my concern for the future of congregational singing. Not only is our Lord still in control but the pendulum will continue to swing until the Lord comes. ... There is no one answer to what is meaningful and effective music in worship. Authentic worship is fluid, for we worship God—Who has no limit.”⁵¹

Causey retires

In April 1998, Causey announced his retirement as the executive of the state convention board, effective at the end of September. His relatively brief administration had much to celebrate. After recovering from a heart attack early in his tenure, he went on to help navigate the state convention through the rough waters of denominational controversy, and he rescued the convention’s relationship with Mississippi College. He left the convention in excellent financial condition, with enough surplus funds to give an extra \$1 million in May 1998 to the Lottie Moon Offering for International Missions.⁵²

Mississippi Baptists under Jim Futral, 1998–2020

James R. “Jim” Futral, pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church, Madison (Madison), since 1985, was unanimously elected as the new executive



Jim Futral.
*Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Baptist
Historical Commission.*

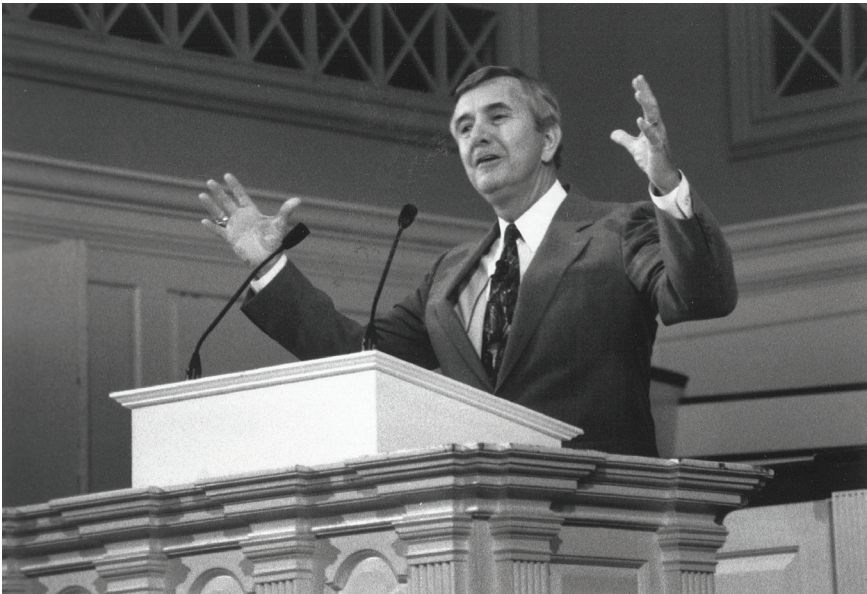
director-treasurer of the MBCB on August 5, 1998. Just as his predecessor had done, Futral went through an orientation period, beginning as director-elect on September 1 and taking over the position fully on October 1, after Causey retired. Futral was born on April 11, 1944, in Fort Smith, Arkansas, and he grew up in north Mississippi. He was converted and baptized at age nine at Pheba Baptist Church (Clay). He graduated from Starkville High School, was licensed at Meadowview Baptist Church, Starkville (Oktibbeha), and was ordained at Hickory Flat Baptist Church (Benton). Futral graduated from Clarke College, Blue Mountain College, and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He served several churches in Mississippi and Texas as pastor. He was president of the state convention from 1987-89 and chairman of the state convention board from 1993-96.⁵³

Futral was a strong communicator. A few weeks after taking office, he began a weekly column in *The Baptist Record*, called “Directions,” in which he said, “We will seek directions as the family of God.” He used the column to stay connected to Mississippi Baptists. Most of the columns were devotional in approach, often sharing anecdotes about Mississippi Baptists. Occasionally, he used “Directions” to address Baptists directly about key issues. Futral also recognized the growing importance of the internet. In June 2001, the state convention board announced a newly designed website. “The medium may change, but the message is eternal,” said Futral.⁵⁴

Like those before him, Futral began reorganizing the state convention

board staff soon after taking office, but he did it gradually. In August 1999, he increased the administrative team from two to three associate executive directors. Barri Shirley was given charge of Resource Services, David Michel was placed over Missions Strategy, and Steve Stone was hired to oversee Church Growth, an area formerly under Eugene Dobbs, who was retiring. Futral explained, “We want the organization serving the people rather than the people serving the organization.”⁵⁵

Frank Pollard, the renowned pastor of First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), decided to retire from his pulpit at the end of 2001. On October 30 of that year, the MBC elected him president by one of the largest margins in history, 717-192, over Bill Smith, associational missions director of Lee Association. The lopsided vote was not against Smith—Smith had received 398 votes in his election as vice president the previous year—rather, it was a recognition of Pollard. The Jackson pastor was admired for his career as a seminary president, a preacher on the *Baptist Hour* radio program for 20 years, and the faithful, stable hand that led First Baptist Church, Jackson, to be one of the largest churches in America. Pollard had agreed to be nominated, but he had not asked a single messenger to vote for him. He received a standing ovation when he was reelected by acclamation in 2002.⁵⁶



Frank Pollard. Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission.

A major issue of concern for Mississippi Baptists in the early 2000s was a revision of the Southern Baptist confession of faith, the Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M), in 2000. The BF&M was originally adopted in 1925 and had only been revised once before, in 1963. The preamble to the earlier confessions said that they were “only guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience,” and that the BF&M was “not an official creed carrying mandatory authority” over the individual believer’s soul before God. The preamble to the 2000 edition omitted the second statement that the BF&M was not an official creed, although it kept the first statement about it being only a guide to interpretation. Critics wondered if this omission intended to change the status of the BF&M from a confession that was a consensus statement to a creed that required mandatory compliance. Most of the doctrinal section of the 2000 BF&M had only minor changes in wording; however, Section VI on “The Church” added a statement that “the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.”⁵⁷

The Baptist Record printed the entire text of the proposed 2000 revision of the Baptist Faith and Message in May, and on June 1, a couple of weeks before the SBC annual meeting, the paper printed the proposed BF&M side by side with the 1963 edition. Kermit McGregor, president of the state convention, reminded Baptists that “no personal or professional document of expression is a binding directive to distinctive congregations.” Most letters to the editor were written in support of the new confession, which was adopted by the SBC.⁵⁸

Kermit McGregor’s view that the BF&M was not to be used as a binding creed was soon tested. On January 20, 2002, Rivercrest Fellowship Church, Flowood (Rankin), called a woman, Carla Street, as senior pastor. Rivercrest was affiliated with the MBC, and Street’s husband, Steve, was coordinator of the Mississippi Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. This ignited a firestorm of debate, reflected in letters to the editor of *The Baptist Record* printed nearly every week for months on both sides of the issue; most were against having a woman serve as pastor. The Pastor’s Conference of Humphreys Baptist Association wrote as a group against a woman pastor, citing 1 Timothy 3:2 that a pastor is to be “husband of one wife.” On the other side, a writer cited Acts 2:17 that both women and men prophesy.⁵⁹

The issue came to head when the MBC held its annual meeting at First Baptist Church, Jackson, on October 29–30, 2002. Sandra Gunn, wife of

Frank Gunn, pastor of First Baptist Church, Biloxi (Harrison), offered a resolution entitled, “Affirmation of the Ministry of Women.” The resolution said “that while we affirm the Biblical and historical position of male pastors, we also support, encourage and thank God for the millions of women who serve in our churches and ministries ...” The resolution passed by a wide margin. Thus, the state convention went on record in support of the new BF&M statement that pastors should be men, but they did not use the BF&M as a binding creed to exclude Rivercrest Fellowship for calling a woman pastor. Not everyone was happy with the compromise. Chuck Poole, pastor of Northminster Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), objected to the resolution’s affirmation of “male only pastors.” Matt Brady, pastor of First Baptist Church, Durant (Holmes), wrote that he was “ashamed of myself and my more tenured brethren” that nobody made a motion against Rivercrest Fellowship. It became a moot issue in the weeks after the controversy, as Rivercrest left the state convention.⁶⁰

Calvinism was another theological issue that Mississippi Baptists debated. As more students graduated from SBC seminaries that taught Calvinism, they increasingly came into conflict with church members in the pew. Futral said that he received more pushback for his “Directions” column on June 14, 2012, that was critical of Calvin’s theology than any other column he wrote in *The Baptist Record*, although he noted that many of the negative responses were from Presbyterians, not Baptists. In August 2012, Eric Hankins, pastor of First Baptist Church, Oxford (Lafayette), was appointed by SBC president Frank Page to a team to recommend ways to craft a strategy that would bring people with different views on Calvinism together. The next year, the advisory committee released a report that urged Baptists to “grant one another liberty” to differ on Calvinism and to “stand together” for the Great Commission. Hankins supported the report.⁶¹

The event that consumed Futral’s time more than any other was Hurricane Katrina. He later recalled, “From the day Katrina hit until the next five years—I went back and looked at my calendar—and every day of my life, Sunday through Saturday, I was involved in something that was a Katrina response.” Katrina was one of the largest hurricanes to hit the United States mainland, striking the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts and raking northward through Mississippi for 17 hours on August 29–30, 2005. The hurricane killed 235 Mississippians, destroyed 60,000 private homes, de-



Auditorium at Gulfshores Baptist Assembly post Hurricane Katrina. *Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.*

stroyed or damaged 250 Baptist churches, and affected the lives of more than one million people. Mississippi Baptists' favorite retreat, Gulfshore Baptist Assembly in Pass Christian, was wiped out. The Gulfport campus of William Carey College suffered severe water damage. However, classes resumed on the coast campus, some using the educational facilities of local churches and trailers on the campus. Futral said, "We put together a separate budget of Katrina response that was about \$25 million that came from everywhere, in addition to the MBC budget." By early October, over 6,000 Southern Baptist volunteers from 40 states came with chainsaws, medical teams, cleanup crews, childcare, and feeding units that served six million meals. These volunteers left a deep spiritual impression on storm victims on the Gulf Coast.⁶²

Seeking to comfort his fellow Baptists, Futral wrote in his "Directions" column soon after the storm, "The Lord Himself reminded me that it was in the midst of the storm that He walked on water. ... Now we live in the storm and its aftermath, and we must look, listen, and experience the wonder of Jesus coming to meet our needs even when we are in the storm." Those words were met with action. In the months that followed, the state convention board provided multiple resources for churches and pastors on

the coast, including mental health counselors and getaways for pastors to events like ballgames. Futral said, “We came really close to canceling the state convention in 2005 because of Katrina, but we didn’t; we went ahead and met and brought the guys up to the convention to pray for them and tell their stories so we would not lose them and they would not be alienated from us.”⁶³

Carey did not close its coast campus, but it did relocate farther inland. In November 2007, Carey President Tommy King announced plans to move Carey on the Coast to a new development called Tradition in central Harrison County near the new state highways 67 and 605, about 15 minutes north of Biloxi. Four buildings were constructed at a cost of \$14 million; classes began at the Tradition campus on August 24, 2009.⁶⁴

Gulfshore Baptist Assembly had survived damage by Hurricane Betsy in 1965, Hurricane Camille in 1969, and Tropical Storm Allison in 2001. However, the fury of Katrina caused Gulfshore to close, never to open again. The rising cost of insurance and stricter building codes made rebuilding too expensive. At its annual meeting on October 31, 2006, the state convention voted to permanently close the assembly, with plans to sell it and build a new facility away from the coastal flood plain. In 2007, a developer expressed interest in buying the property for \$18 million, promising not to build a casino, but the economic recession of 2008 caused him to rescind his offer, and the property remained unsold.⁶⁵ Before his retirement in January 2008, Frank Simmons reflected on the impact Gulfshore had made during his 30 years as manager. His records showed that 425,000 people had attended events at Gulfshore. “We had professions of faith, baptisms, and weddings at Gulfshore—even deaths. It was where life happened.”⁶⁶

Only three years after Hurricane Katrina, the state convention faced another major challenge. The Great Recession that began in 2008 hit the state convention harder than any economic downturn since the Great Depression. The fiscal downturn forced the convention to slash its budget almost every year for half a decade. The budget continuously decreased from a record high of \$34.9 million in 2009 to \$31.2 million in 2014; the convention was able to raise the budget slightly in fall 2015 for the following year, but the budget continued to hover around \$31 million to \$32 million for the rest of the decade.⁶⁷

Despite these challenges, Baptist institutions continued to expand

during Futral's tenure, both before and after the hurricane and recession. On March 15, 1999, just before the annual meeting of the Mississippi WMU, Camp Garaywa dedicated a new \$1.5 million lodge with 30 rooms for adults. The new lodge was named Patterson Place for retired Mississippi WMU director Marjean Patterson.⁶⁸

Central Hills Baptist Retreat, the camp for boys near Kosciusko, began a \$1.75 million building project in 1999. Improvements included two lodges, a multipurpose building, maintenance facility, and paved roads. The Bill Causey Missions and Activities Center was dedicated on August 28, 2001. A new dining hall, double the size of the earlier one at Central Hills, was opened on April 16, 2009. They bought 187 additional acres in 2014 that gave direct frontage and an entryway at Highway 19, bringing the size of the retreat to 908 acres.⁶⁹

The Baptist Children's Village (BCV) dedicated new buildings and made renovations on the India Nunnery Campus in Jackson in May 2000. However, citing a need for a change in leadership, on June 24, 2003, the trustees requested the resignation of the executive director, Ronny Robinson. Causey served as interim director for a year, and then the trustees offered the position to Rory Lee, effective June 1, 2004. Lee had served in top administrative positions at Mississippi College and William Carey College before becoming president of Louisiana College. He resigned the college presidency to take the helm of the BCV.⁷⁰

Under Lee's leadership, the BCV moved the main campus from Flag Chapel Road in Jackson to a new facility in Star, and they sold the old campus to the Methodist Children's Home in August 2010. Administrative offices were moved to Ridgeland. The BCV also had campuses in Coldwater, Water Valley, Louisville, Brookhaven, Wiggins, Columbia, and Waynesboro. In addition, five acres had been donated for a facility in New Albany, and plans were in the works for a facility in the Delta region. All of this enabled the BCV to complete a network of facilities within 50 miles of families around the state, as required by the Mississippi Department of Human Services. Lee stressed that they sought to have "smaller, more homelike settings" that are "healthier for our children." Lee also instituted the Dorcas Program, which supplied counselors to dysfunctional families that were not abusive. Dorcas counselors helped parents function in a more healthy way to avoid losing their children to the state. "This was one of the most

successful programs we had at the Baptist Children's Village, because it kept families united," said Lee. In 2017, Sean Milner, a successful attorney and a former resident of the Village, was named to succeed Lee following his retirement.⁷¹

On May 30, 2008, the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission dedicated the Mississippi Baptist Beginnings historical exhibit at a site on Highway 61, four miles south of Fayette. The location was chosen because it was near the location of the first Baptist church in the state, Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson) on Coles Creek. A 30-foot cross was erected facing the road, and 17 plaques were placed on a large circular drive to tell the story of Mississippi Baptists.⁷²

On August 22, 2016, a ribbon-cutting ceremony was held for a new 14,540-square-foot Baptist Student Union building at Mississippi State University, making it one of the largest BSU buildings in the SBC. Space limitations had been in place the entire 14 years that BSU director Michael Ball had directed the program.⁷³

In September 2016, the Baptist health systems in Jackson and Memphis began negotiating a merger. At the time, the Memphis system had 17 hospitals and 14,000 employees, some in Mississippi. The Jackson system had four facilities and 3,700 employees. On May 1, 2017, the Jackson and Memphis systems announced the completion of the merger, called Baptist OneCare, making it one of the largest nonprofit healthcare systems in the United States. Futral said the merger "will serve to help provide an even better health care system for people across Mississippi."⁷⁴

Baptist colleges during the Futral years

Harold Fisher retired as president of Blue Mountain College on June 30, 2000, after 35 years as president. The state convention passed a resolution in 2000 expressing "its esteem, its admiration, and its deep appreciation" to Fisher. On February 23, 2001, Blue Mountain trustees elected Bettye Rogers Coward, academic vice president of Mississippi College, to be the school's first female president. In fall 2005, trustees voted to open all programs to male students, beginning in January 2006. President Coward said the change to a coeducational college was necessary to adjust to the needs



Bettye Coward.
*Photo courtesy of
Mississippi College.*

of the day. During her tenure, the college underwent a beautification project and increased enrollment to more than 500. Coward retired on June 30, 2012.⁷⁵ Barbara Childers McMillin, dean of instruction at Union University, became president on August 2, 2012. McMillin grew up in Faulkner, 15 miles north of Blue Mountain. In 2014, the college bought the former Blue Mountain Children's Home to use as a men's dormitory, as male enrollment had grown from 86 in 2004 to 217 in 2014.⁷⁶

Howell Todd retired as president of Mississippi College in summer 2001, and on January 30, 2002, trustees selected Lee G. Royce, president of Anderson College in South Carolina, to be the new president, taking office July 1. In 2006, the NCAA reviewed the use of American Indian names for mascots that might be offensive. At first, it sought to forbid the use of "Choctaws" by Mississippi College. However, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians supported the use of the name, and it was kept. During Royce's 15 years as president, enrollment mushroomed from 3,200 to nearly 5,200, and over 1,100 students made first-time professions of faith. Royce retired in May 2018. Blake Thompson, a native of Rienzi and vice president of governmental affairs at Ohio State University, was presented as the new president on May 14, 2018.⁷⁷

After about a year as interim president of William Carey College, trustees elected Larry Kennedy as president on August 6, 1998. Aware of the questions swirling around his predecessor, Kennedy said, "I pledge ... to

lead the college with a spirit of integrity that will honor the heritage of this great college.” Under Kennedy, enrollment hit a record high of 2,401 students in 2003. In January 2006, Kennedy announced that he had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), commonly known as Lou Gehrig’s Disease. He lived another nine months; during that time, Carey retired its debt ahead of schedule and changed its name to William Carey University, effective August 14. Kennedy died on the morning of September 21, 2006, from complications of ALS. He was 64. During his seven-year tenure, almost \$17 million in campus improvements were made, the debt was retired, and enrollment reached 3,000.⁷⁸

William Carey University’s trustees chose R. Thomas “Tommy” King to be president on February 15, 2007. King had a diverse background as a pastor, public school educator, university professor, and counselor. In addition to transferring the coast campus inland, King led Carey to open a medical school. In 2010, Carey completed construction of the \$11.5 million College of Osteopathic Medicine on the Hattiesburg campus. One of 26 such medical schools in the U.S., and the only one in the Mid-South, the college granted a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree (DO). The DO is comparable to an MD but is distinct in its emphasis on a whole-person approach, including recognition of the connection between the physical and spiritual.⁷⁹

In the early morning hours of January 21, 2017, Hattiesburg was hit hard by an EF-3 tornado. It damaged nearly all 30 buildings on the Carey campus; the cost to repair exceeded \$120 million. Seven students suffered non-life-threatening injuries, although four people in the neighborhood were killed. Four students in a car experienced their car being lifted in the air. President King said, “When my wife and I first arrived on campus, I wasn’t sure we could recover from this.” He quickly changed his mind when he saw the determination of faculty, staff, and students and how the community rallied around them. Thanks to shared classroom space by the University of Southern Mississippi and local churches, as well as some classes moving online, students were able to finish the final two weeks of the trimester. “I’m astounded,” said King. “While our campus is closed at this time, William Carey University is up and running.” Under the slogan “Carey Strong,” the school rebuilt better than before, even while declining to take federal funds. On July 18, 2019, the new Tatum Court was dedicat-

ed, the last step in rebuilding the Hattiesburg campus. Futral said, “What Tommy King did in rebuilding William Carey University was absolutely phenomenal. He was one great leader.”⁸⁰

Social issues during the Futral years

The Christian Action Commission (CAC) led the MBC in addressing social and moral concerns. Paul Griffin Jones retired as executive director-treasurer of the CAC in 1999, after 18 years in the position. Jimmy Porter, pastor of First Baptist Church, McComb (Pike), was chosen to replace Jones on March 14, 2000. Porter had previously served as president of the state convention. Porter retired in 2015. In 2016, the board chose Kenny Digby, associational missions director of Alcorn Baptist Association, to take the helm of the CAC.⁸¹

William Perkins, editor of *The Baptist Record*, was not afraid to use the power of the press to speak out on social issues. When the legislature met to consider land-based casinos in 2005, Perkins wrote, “The bodies of the dead haven’t yet all been counted in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and the gambling/political complex in Mississippi is exploiting this human tragedy to advance their agenda in the state. What a disgrace.” When the Supreme Court allowed same-sex marriage in the 2015 case *Obergefell v. Hodges*, Perkins wrote, “The nine black-robed justices who engineered a new constitutional right out of thin air sounded more like TV soap opera enthusiasts than experienced jurists.”⁸² Baptist pressure had kept the legislature from establishing a state lottery until 2018, when it passed the state house 58-54. Perkins published in *The Baptist Record* a “Lottery Hall of Shame” with the names of legislators who voted for the lottery, but the deed was done.⁸³

Some of the most significant issues Baptists confronted during the Futral years were racism, abortion, homosexuality, and gambling. In 1999, First Baptist Church, Biloxi (Harrison), faced a dilemma regarding gambling. The church was boxed in by surrounding casinos and had no room to expand its facilities. Unable to find any other buyer, in September 1999, the Biloxi church voted 80% in favor of selling the property to a casino so they could relocate north of I-10. Pastor Frank Gunn said, “We certainly

would have preferred a less controversial purchaser.” Many Baptists living upstate second-guessed this decision.⁸⁴

Mississippi Baptists consistently opposed homosexual practice during this time. In 2004, the state convention passed a resolution saying that a state and federal constitutional amendment was needed, defining marriage as a union of one man and one woman, “in order to prevent state courts or the United States Supreme Court from redefining marriage.”⁸⁵

Race relations and racism were constant themes throughout Mississippi Baptist history, and the same was true in the Futral years. One of the most contentious issues regarding race was the controversy over the state flag. The Mississippi flag that was adopted in 1894 by the state legislature had the Confederate battle emblem in a field in the upper left corner, accompanied by blue, white, and red stripes. In early 2000, Governor Ronnie Musgrove asked the state legislature to remove the Confederate symbol from the state flag. A commission led by former Governor William Winter offered an alternative state flag with a circle of stars in a blue field in place of the Confederate emblem. The legislature allowed a popular referendum on the two designs.⁸⁶

Leading up to the vote in the fall of 2001, prominent White Baptist leaders supported changing the state flag, while most people in the pews of Southern Baptist churches did not. Governor Musgrove, who first proposed the change, was a Baptist. Jimmy Porter of the CAC encouraged voters to “make it ‘our flag,’” citing 1 Corinthians 8 about not offending a brother in Christ and 2 Corinthians 5 about being ministers of reconciliation. Futral, executive director of the state convention board, used his “Directions” column to encourage readers to vote for the new flag. He acknowledged that it was a symbol of Southern heritage to many people but also reminded readers that it was a painful symbol of suffering to Black people, like the Nazi swastika was to Jewish people. These White Baptist leaders received a great deal of pushback in letters to the editor, mostly from laypeople defending “our history and heritage.” That November, voters supported keeping the flag unchanged by a margin of 67% to 33%.⁸⁷

The 2001 vote on the state flag settled the issue for a time, but it did not go away. In 2014, the state convention voted to endorse President Matt Buckles’s statement recognizing racial diversity and supporting a new state flag. Other state Baptist leaders continued to call for a new flag, including

Futral and William Perkins, editor of *The Baptist Record*.⁸⁸

White Baptists in Mississippi, from political leaders to ordinary members in local churches, continued to wrestle with how to overcome racism. In December 2003, U.S. Senator Trent Lott, a Mississippi Baptist, praised segregationist and former Senator Strom Thurmond on his 100th birthday. Lott apologized, but he did not satisfy critics who saw his remarks as racist. First Baptist Church, Crystal Springs (Copiah), made national headlines in 2012 when a Black couple, who were scheduled to be married at the sanctuary of the predominantly White congregation, were forced to change the venue because the pastor was pressured by a few members not to have the ceremony at First Baptist. The church's deacons publicly apologized to the couple and stated that their church was "open to everyone."⁸⁹

In 2013, First Baptist Church, Oxford (Lafayette), took the bold step of publicly apologizing for its decision to exclude Black people from worship in 1968. The church asked for forgiveness from a Black congregation, Second Baptist Church, Oxford (Lafayette), since First Baptist had declined to host a community prayer meeting when Second Baptist had been invited. Pastor Andrew Robinson of Second Baptist said, "I had never seen any church or organization move that seriously toward repentance and then apologize without any excuse."⁹⁰

In the 21st century, it became more common for racial minorities to serve in leadership roles in the MBC. Joel Medina, pastor of Iglesia Internacional de Las Americas in Carthage, was elected second vice president of the state convention in 2004, the first Hispanic person to be elected to a state convention office. Medina was praised for his church planting work that had been blessed with 200 decisions for Christ in six years. Larry Young, pastor of Spangle Banner Baptist Church, Pace (Bolivar), was elected second vice president of the state convention in 2014, the first Black officer elected to a state convention office.⁹¹

There was no issue that Mississippi Baptists were more united and passionate about than protecting the lives of the unborn. A provocative campaign against abortion captured the imagination of Mississippi Baptists in 2006. Futral says that it came to his mind when he was traveling to speak at a pro-life event in the north Mississippi Delta. "There had been 50 million abortions. I wanted something that would memorialize the 50 million voiceless children. These children never went to kindergarten, never



Larry Young and his wife.
Photo courtesy of Larry Young.



Memorial to the Missing. *Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.*

learned ‘Jesus Love Me’—50 million, but there was no memorial to them.” Dubbed the “Memorial to the Missing,” a container 13 feet by seven feet was constructed on the grounds of the Baptist Building in Jackson, facing the state capital building. People were invited to fill it with 50 million pennies. “Every penny placed in this receptacle will represent one child whose life has been short-circuited by abortion,” explained Futral. Every Southern Baptist church in the state was mailed a heavy-duty woven sack that could hold 15,000 pennies, and they were invited to bring pennies to a pro-life rally at the Baptist Building on May 13, the day before Mother’s Day. Baptists and other Christians in the state enthusiastically responded, bringing 20 million pennies to the rally. Pennies continued to pour in for the next two years, and the Memorial to the Missing was filled with 50 million pennies as of November 2008. The memorial remained on display for five years. Futral often looked out the window and saw people standing at the memorial, praying. He remembered one couple who drove from Arkansas to see the memorial. They quietly placed three pennies in the slot into the receptacle and wept. As they were leaving, Futral spoke to them and learned that their daughter had three abortions, and they wanted to remember the grandchildren they would never see in this life. “While the Memorial cannot hold any more pennies, the abortions continue,” said Jimmy Porter of the CAC. The money raised was donated to an endowment for pro-life causes. Futral said, “We had experience after experience of people talking about it. We could never get any national news coverage. No national news media wanted to cover it.”⁹²

Futral retires

The 2019 fall meeting of the state convention bade farewell to Futral, who retired as executive director–treasurer of the MBCB. When he announced his retirement, he was asked if he was retiring because someone had said something to him, and Futral replied, “It was the Lord.” His 22 years of service marked the longest tenure of any executive in the history of the state convention board. Futral was honored for his years of service with a resolution that praised “his creativity, his convictions, his courage, and his commitment to Christlikeness in all matters.” Futral entitled his final

“Directions” column in *The Baptist Record*, “It Is Finished.” He reflected on his ministry, concluding that while his role was finished, “... for all of us it is not finished. There is still work to be done. There is still service to be rendered, souls to be reached, and a faithfulness that must be lived out by us today and tomorrow ... and His calling and opportunity to serve Him is not finished until He says, ‘It is finished.’”⁹³

Chapter 14

COVID-19 and Beyond

2020 – Present

The year 2020 was one of social upheaval unlike America had ever experienced. On March 11, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 virus to be a pandemic, and soon churches were meeting on-line instead of in person. Hundreds of thousands of Americans died, as millions more suffered the social anxiety of separation from loved ones and closed churches, schools, and businesses. On May 25, a Minneapolis, Minnesota, police officer killed a Black man, George Floyd, during his arrest. Thousands of protests, some violent, spread across America, calling for racial justice. On November 3, Joe Biden defeated incumbent Donald Trump in a razor-thin race for the White House, but Trump questioned the fairness of the vote, claiming that he should still be president.¹

The following years were no more harmonious. On January 6, 2021, thousands of Trump supporters left a rally in Washington, D.C., and marched on the Capitol, demanding that Trump be certified as the winner of the election. Some rioted, storming the Capitol before they were expelled.² The nation was also sharply divided over the June 2022 Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs*, a case which originated in Mississippi, overturning *Roe v. Wade* and returning to the states the right to regulate abortion.³

Amid the political and social turmoil, Mississippi Baptist churches struggled to bounce back from the COVID-19 pandemic and return to

ministry. During the pandemic, church attendance took a nosedive. By 2022, most churches had returned to meeting in person, and by 2023, many Mississippi Baptists were seeing increases in attendance and participation in ministry. For example, First Baptist Church, Collinsville (Lauderdale), reported a 50% increase in attendance from 2021 to 2024.⁴ Some felt increased attendance was aided by the revivals that swept Christian college campuses in 2023, including the revival at Blue Mountain Christian University in February of that year.⁵

Southern Baptist leaders from Mississippi

A Mississippi native was at the center of a controversy in Southern Baptist life during this period. Russell Moore of Biloxi had been elected president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in 2013. Moore faced backlash over his criticism of the personal immorality of President Trump. He also upset some in the SBC when he supported the religious freedom of Muslims in New Jersey to build an Islamic Center in that state. In 2021, the SBC Executive Committee appointed a task force that was critical of Moore and the ERLC. In return, Moore was critical of the Executive Committee, especially when the committee declined to create a database of Southern Baptists convicted of sexual abuse. Moore resigned soon afterward to take a position with *Christianity Today* magazine.⁶

Mississippi Baptists under Shawn Parker, 2020–present

On December 19, 2019, Shawn Parker, the pastor of First Baptist Church, Columbus (Lowndes), was elected as the new executive director–treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB), effective upon Futral’s retirement at the end of February 2020.

Parker was born August 13, 1969, in Booneville and raised in Michie, Tennessee, 12 miles north of Corinth. He accepted Christ, was baptized, and felt a call to ministry at First Baptist Church, Michie.⁷

Parker was forced to face critical issues right after taking office. On



Shawn Parker.

Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

March 19, about a week after COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic, Parker tried to reassure readers in his new “Simple Truth” column in *The Baptist Record*, “In light of the mass fear that has swept across the world in the last few weeks, we’ll all do well to remember that God is in control. ... While we should demonstrate due caution in responding to any pandemic, we ought to manage our fear so as to prevent paralysis on any level. ... When we have a healthy fear of the Lord, our fear of everything else tends to find its proper place.” Meetings sponsored by the state convention board had to be canceled. SBC leaders canceled the SBC annual meeting scheduled for June, and on August 25, the state convention board decided to cancel the Mississippi Baptist Convention (MBC) annual meeting scheduled for October. So much money was saved in canceled events that the state convention board donated an extra \$1 million to the SBC International Mission Board.⁸

The COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing that began in March 2020 forced churches to innovate. For the first couple of weeks after lockdown was announced, Shawn Parker and state convention leaders hosted four or five Zoom meetings a day with 30 to 40 pastors at a time, giving updates about government orders, shutdowns, and allowing pastors to talk among themselves about how to cope. After that, the churches found their own footing. Some 85% of churches livestreamed their services on the In-

ternet. First Baptist Church, Belmont (Tishomingo), was one of many congregations that began drive-in church services. Beginning March 22, Belmont members sat in their cars in the church parking lot to see one another and listen to the service on FM radio. *The Baptist Record* reported on April 2, 2020, that First Baptist Church, Saltillo (Lee), and First Baptist Church, New Augusta (Perry), were among many churches that were broadcasting services on Facebook Live. First Baptist Church, Madison (Madison), featured a “virtual choir.” First Baptist Church, Yazoo City (Yazoo), offered virtual VBS, as video recordings of teachers were aired. Bay Springs Baptist Church, Bay Springs (Jasper), baptized a new believer in a trough in the back of a pickup truck in the parking lot since the church was holding services outdoors. Governor Tate Reeves allowed churches in Mississippi to resume in-person services sooner than many other states, but some of the innovations remained when churches returned to worship in person, such as an increased use of online giving and use of Facebook broadcasts. Everywhere, new options were available in worship. Temple Baptist Church, Hattiesburg (Lamar), gave members the choice to drop their offerings in boxes in the worship center or office or give on its website, through its app, through text message, or through the mail.⁹

Parker faced a second critical issue early in his tenure after the death of George Floyd in Minnesota on May 25. The ensuing protests reignited calls for removal of the Confederate symbol in the Mississippi state flag. A few weeks later, a bill to change the state flag was seriously discussed in both houses of the Mississippi legislature. On June 23, 2020, the Executive Committee of the MBCB called a press conference to announce their endorsement of the change in the state flag. Parker said, “Our position is motivated by our understanding of the teaching of Jesus Christ.” How much influence this had on the state legislature is hard to know, but five days later, the legislature voted to retire the state flag and seek a new one.¹⁰

In July, William H. Perkins, Jr., editor of *The Baptist Record*, announced that the newspaper would cease printing after 143 years, going fully digital and free of charge on its own website. Perkins cited the newspaper’s declining print subscription base along with the lack of advertising due to the COVID-19 pandemic as reasons for ceasing print publication. The next year, *The Baptist Record* introduced a smartphone app for fast access on Apple and Android devices. Perkins retired in 2023, and Tony Martin

took over as editor.¹¹

Like his predecessors, Parker announced a major administrative reorganization of the state convention board, effective April 1, 2021. “We want to renew our focus on the local church,” he stressed. The new structure made Michael Lee the chief strategic officer to oversee ministries, and Barri Shirley was named chief operating officer to administer business and financial matters. Ministry departments were grouped under three teams: Church Engagement, Church Health, and Church Support. Two new consultants were added for church revitalization and for multicultural ministries.¹²

During Parker’s tenure, Southern Baptists once again debated whether to make the Baptist Faith and Message doctrinal statement that pastors were only to be men binding on churches. In 2019, the SBC had made its Credentials Committee a standing committee so that the committee could act throughout the year against churches considered “not in friendly co-operation.” The stated purpose was to guard against churches that allowed sexual abuse or racism, but it also came to be used to enforce doctrinal agreement with the BF&M. In 2023, the SBC Executive Committee affirmed a recommendation from the Credentials Committee to remove six churches from affiliation with the SBC: one for failure to cooperate in a sex abuse allegation and five for calling a woman as senior pastor. A Mississippi Baptist church was on that list: Calvary Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), where Linda Smith was senior pastor. Calvary reluctantly accepted the ouster, knowing they could not win an appeal. Smith told *The Baptist Record*, “Calvary has been a part of the SBC for 122 years. ... We believe in the autonomy of the local church to decide on leadership. The church and I felt God leading me to become the pastor in 2013. We are wholeheartedly trying to share the Good News of Jesus with our community.”¹³

Changes at Mississippi Baptist colleges

The relationship with the Choctaw tribe and Mississippi College deepened in 2022, when President Blake Thompson signed a Memorandum of Understanding with tribal chief Cyrus Ben, himself a 2001 graduate of Mississippi College and a professing Christian. The deeper relationship included tuition aid for qualified tribal members to attend the school, a

Choctaw cultural festival on campus, and a redesigned college logo that resembled an eagle, which the Choctaw consider the greatest of birds.¹⁴

William Carey University reached an enrollment of 5,260 on its three campuses by 2020, surpassing Mississippi College as the largest Baptist college in the state. King announced his retirement as president, effective August 16, 2022, and the trustees chose as the new president Ben Burnett, who was executive vice president of Carey.¹⁵

In 2022, the trustees of Blue Mountain College voted to add a school of nursing and change the name of the school to Blue Mountain Christian University. President Barbara McMillin said the new name was useful “both in distinguishing the institution from two-year community colleges and in highlighting its Christian identity and mission.”¹⁶

In February 2023, a spiritual awakening at Asbury University, a Wesleyan school in Kentucky, spread to many other Christian colleges, including Blue Mountain. A regularly scheduled chapel service at Blue Mountain on a Friday morning resulted in students praying at the altar and continuing to sing and worship throughout the day and night. “This is God at work, unscripted, unorchestrated by anything we could try to do. That’s just how God is,” said McMillin.¹⁷

Mississippi Baptists confront social issues

Pro-life Mississippi Baptists celebrated in 2022 when the Supreme Court used a case from Mississippi to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, helping to close the only abortion clinic in the state. In 2018, Andy Gipson of Braxton, the bivocational pastor of Gum Springs Baptist Church, Braxton (Simpson), helped set in motion the law that would eventually be appealed to the Supreme Court. Gipson was chairman of the Mississippi House Judiciary Committee that brought forward the Gestation Age Act, HB1510, limiting most abortions in the state to 15 weeks gestation. The bill was authored by Becky Currie, an Episcopalian and registered nurse who said, “Life is a gift from God, and we must cherish it.” After Governor Phil Bryant signed HB1510 into law, it was challenged in court by the Jackson abortion clinic, and a federal judge struck it down. Attorney General Lynn Fitch, a Methodist, argued the case, known as *Dobbs vs. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*

before the U.S. Supreme Court. On June 24, 2022, the Supreme Court used the case to overrule *Roe v. Wade* and return to the states the right to make their own laws about abortion. Shortly afterwards, the only abortion clinic in the state closed its doors.¹⁸

Calls for sexual abuse reform began in the 2010s after news stories began to surface among Mississippi Baptists and throughout the SBC of pastors being arrested for sexual crimes such as voyeurism and the abuse of young boys and girls. Paige Patterson was forced to resign as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth after being accused of covering up cases of rape on campus. The 2021 meeting of the MBC debated a motion to create a sexual abuse task force to investigate state convention board ministries and its entities. Shawn Parker, executive director–treasurer of the state convention board, said that the issue had been reviewed and confirmed with legal counsel that the board’s procedures to handle cases of sexual abuse were up to date. The motion failed. However, in 2022 Parker and Lloyd Sweatt, president of the state convention, asked Brad Eubank, pastor of First Baptist Church, Petal (Forrest), to chair a Sexual Abuse Task Force to help churches fight against abuse in local churches. “I’m a survivor of sex abuse,” said Eubank. “I’ve never been afraid to share my story. When we share our stories, people feel more free to share their stories.”¹⁹

Challenges facing the state convention

While dominant and influential in the state, the MBC faced serious challenges during this time. Participation in the WMU declined dramatically during the 21st century: Mississippi reported WMU enrollment of 61,243 in 1990 but only 10,099 in 2020. There were several possible reasons for this decline. Some conservative Baptists deliberately promoted other women’s ministries because they identified WMU with the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship that the national WMU continued to support. At the same time, many churches moved away from the RAs and GAs children’s mission programs, replacing them with the Awana Bible memorization program for children.²⁰

The state convention saw its total membership rise from 675,824 in

1990 to 718,185 in 2000, then decline to 697,417 in 2010. Membership plummeted to 545,102 in 2020. This decline was not isolated to Mississippi nor Baptists but was part of an overall secularization of America. The SBC experienced membership growth until 2006; after that, the denomination began an annual decline. A study by the Pew Research Center found that the percentage of American adults affiliated with a Christian denomination fell from 78% in 2007 to 63% in 2021, while the percentage with no religion rose during the same period from 16% to 29%. In addition to a decline in membership, the state convention saw a decline in attendance at its annual meeting. The 1990 annual meeting had 1,881 messengers, the 2000 meeting had 1,557 messengers, the 2010 meeting had 1,025 messengers, and although the 2020 meeting was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 meeting had 698 messengers.²¹

Changes in worship style

When the MBC met in 1990, the congregational songs were almost entirely hymns. The clerk recorded two hymns sung at the Wednesday night session: “Glorious Is Thy Name” and “How Great Thou Art,” and, he added, “the chorus, ‘Majesty.’” When the state convention met three decades later, the congregational songs were quite different. The 2021 meeting featured such praise and worship songs as “Who You Say I Am” and “King of Kings” by Hillsong Worship and “I Speak Jesus” by Charity Gayle.²² Music was not the only way that worship changed. Churches incorporated modern technology such as wireless mics, the projection of words on a screen, and LifeWay’s digital hymnal out of a desire to reach contemporary culture.²³

Since 2000, a continual decline in the number of small churches in the MBC was coupled with a consistent rise in the number of larger churches. In 2000, there were 1,612 Mississippi Baptist churches with less than 400 members and only 310 churches with 400 or more members. By 2021, the number of smaller churches (less than 400 members) dropped to 1,067, while the number of larger churches (400 or more members) increased to 373. Not only were there more larger churches, but several of those congregations became megachurches, with more members than some entire Baptist associations. Some megachurches had multiple campuses in different

cities, such as Pinelake Church, Brandon (Rankin), and Venture Church, Hattiesburg (Lamar). In 2019, Venture Church was listed as the 29th fastest growing church in America, and First Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), was listed 55th. Pinelake was the 22nd largest church in America, with a weekly average attendance of 11,042. Jeff Clark, pastor of Venture, said, “We are living proof that churches can grow if they are willing to shed old methods and models of ministry while sticking to the same life-changing message of Jesus.”²⁴

As he looked to the future, Shawn Parker said, “I would love for the Mississippi Baptist Convention to be more reflective of the state in demographics: more diverse, more multicultural. I would love for us to share the gospel and help Mississippians share the Lord.”²⁵

As Southern Baptists in the Magnolia State looked to the future, they faced daunting challenges. Yet over two centuries of history reveal an inward courage and the determination of a people who remained faithful to the gospel through controversies, tragedy, sin, and social change. These flawed but faithful men and women are the reason Mississippi remains the state with the highest concentration of Baptists in America. This is the story of Mississippi Southern Baptists.

Appendix A

Salem Baptist Church Covenant and Articles of Faith

Salem Baptist Church on Coles Creek in Jefferson County was the first Baptist church in Mississippi, organized in 1791. The earliest minutes are lost, but this covenant and articles of faith, written in the minutes on May 8, 1816, appear to reflect their original document. The minutes record that the members examined the earlier church book and then wrote down these minutes on May 8, 1816. Source: Minutes, Salem Baptist Church, 7–10, May 8, 1816.

May 8, 1816. Church Covenant & Articles of Faith agreed upon & entered into by the Baptist Church of Salem, Jefferson County, Mississippi Territory.

Being baptized according to the apostolic mode, desirous to maintain the true principles of Christianity.

To the Honour of God and the edification of each other, having united together as a religious body to worship God.

To celebrate his ordinances, to maintain his truths and to endeavour to promote his glory in the world.

This we promise to profess, and by and defend the following Doctrines, and to observe the Rules of Discipline hereinafter mentioned.

Art. 1st. That the Holy Scriptures of the Old and new Testament are the

word of God and the only certain & infallible rule of Faith and obedience, containing everything needful for us to know, believe and do in the service of God, and able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith that is in Christ Jesus, by which we expect to be judged at the Last day, and to which our opinions and practices ought at all times to be conformed, and therefore that all persons who can read the scriptures ought to search them daily, praying to God for the light of his Holy Spirit without which none can understand them effectually.

Art. 2nd. That there is but one Living and true God, the Almighty creator, the server and disposer of all things visible & invisible, in whom we live, move and have our being, and to whom alone all divine worship & adoration is to be rendered both in time and eternity by men and angels as being only worthy of it and that he will not give his glory to another or his Praise to Idols, having strictly forbidden us to worship or adore any but himself.

Art. 3rd. That there are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son & Holy Ghost, the same in substance power & glory and therefore not to be divided in essence though distinguished by several peculiar personal relations.

Art. 4th. That our Lord Jesus Christ the second person of the adorable Trinity who was Eternally with the Father, did in time take on him a real Human nature in which he fulfilled the Law, and died to make atonement for sins, is the only saviour of sinners, the Prophet, Priest and King of his Church, appointed heir of all things and judge of the quick and the dead, in whom alone we hope for and expect Redemption and deliverance from Divine wrath and eternal misery.

Art. 5th. We believe in the doctrine of Particular Redemption Personal Election Effectual Calling, Justification by the imputed Righteousness of Jesus Christ, Pardon of sins by his atoning blood, Believers Baptism by Immersion, the final perseverance of the saints, the resurrection of the dead and Eternal Judgment.

Art. 6th. That Christ will return in glory to judge men and angels at the end of the world, at which time the righteous will enter into everlast-

ing life of happiness, but the wicked shall be driven way into Everlasting and eternal Misery. Which doctrines are contained at large in the scriptures of the old and new testament.

Rules of Discipline.

We do agree to conform to the following rules of discipline, as well as all others directed by the word of God. Not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but constantly attending our appointed meetings as far as the Lord shall enable us, not forsaking any of them, but in case of necessity. To bear each one his part according as the Lord shall prosper him, in defraying such expenses as are necessary for maintaining the worship of God in decency and order. Not to expose the infirmities of each other by any means when it may be Lawfully avoided. Not to remove our residence to any distance part without applying to the church for a letter of Dismission.

Not willing to live in the neglect of any known duty to God, to our neighbor, or one another; but to endeavor to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, Blameless.

To bear Reproof and Reprove each other in the case of visible faults in Christian Charity and Brotherly love, as ordered by Christ in the Gospel.

Signed by [All of the names listed are in the same handwriting, indicating this was copied from the previous book. The only founding member listed is John Jones, Sr. Interestingly, the name of Richard Curtis, Jr., is missing.]

Appendix B

Articles of Faith, Rules, etc., of the Mississippi Baptist Association, 1807

Source: T.M. Bond, *A Republication of the Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association* (New Orleans: Hinton & Co., 1849), 7–11.

PREAMBLE

We, the churches of Jesus Christ, who have been regularly baptized upon a profession of our faith, are convinced of the necessity of a combination of churches, and of maintaining a correspondence, for the preserving a federal union among all the churches of the same faith and order. We, therefore, do agree to unite and form ourselves an Association, upon the following principles:

ARTICLES OF FAITH

1. We believe in one only true and living God; and that there are a trinity of persons in the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the same in essence, equal in power and glory.
2. We believe the scriptures of the Old and New Testament, were given by inspiration of God, are of Divine authority, and the only rule of faith and practice.
3. We believe in the fall of Adam; in the imputation of his sins to all his posterity; in the total depravity of human nature; and in man's

inability to restore himself to the favor of God.

4. We believe in the everlasting love of God to his people; in the eternal unconditional election of a definite number of the human family to grace and glory.
5. We believe that sinners are only justified in the sight of God, by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is unto all and upon all them that believe.
6. We believe all those who were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world are, in time, effectually called, regenerated, converted, and sanctified; and are kept, by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.
7. We believe there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who, by the satisfaction which he made to law and justice, “in becoming an offering for sin,” hath, by his most precious blood, redeemed the elect from under the curse of the law, that they might be holy and without blame before him in love.
8. We believe good works are the fruit of faith, and follow after justification, are evidences of a gracious state, and that it is the duty of all believers to perform them from a principle of love.
9. We believe in the resurrection of the dead, and a general judgment, and that the happiness of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked will be eternal.

ON GOSPEL ORDER

1. We believe that the visible church of Jesus Christ is a congregation of faithful persons, who have given themselves up to the Lord, and to one another, and have covenanted to keep up a godly discipline agreeable to the rulers of the gospel.
2. We believe that Jesus Christ is the head of the church, the only law-giver; that the government is with the body—“the church” – and is equally the right and privilege of each member thereof.
3. We believe that baptism and the Lord’s supper are gospel ordinances, appointed by Jesus Christ, and are to be continued in the church.
4. We believe that baptism, by immersion, is the only scriptural mode, and that believers are the only proper subjects.
5. We believe that none but regular baptized church members have a

right to partake of the Lord's supper.

6. We believe it to be the duty and privilege of all believers to make a public profession of their faith, to submit to baptism by immersion, and to give themselves members of the visible church.
7. We believe it is the duty of every regular organized church to expel from their communion all disorderly members who are immoral in their lives, or that hold doctrines contrary to the scriptures.

RULES OF DECORUM

1. Those delegates who are regularly chosen by the churches in our union shall compose the Association.
2. The delegates so chosen shall produce letters from their respective churches, certifying their appointment, together with their number in fellowship, those baptized, received by letter, restored, dismissed, excommunicated, and dead, since the last Association.
3. The delegates thus chosen and convened shall be denominated the "Mississippi Baptist Association."
4. This Association shall have a moderator and clerk, who shall be chosen by the members present.
5. If new churches desire to be admitted into the union, they shall petition by letter and delegates; if, on examination, found orthodox and orderly, they shall be received by the Association, manifested by the moderator giving their delegates the right hand of fellowship.
6. No church in the union shall have a right to more than two delegates, until she shall exceed one hundred members. Then she shall have a right to an additional delegate for every fifty.
7. Every query sent to the Association by any church in the union shall be read and put to vote by the moderator, whether it shall be debated, and if there shall be a majority for it, it shall be taken up and investigated; provided, always, that those be first considered which affect the union of the churches.
8. Every motion made and seconded shall be taken up by the Association, except it be withdrawn by the person who made it.
9. Only one person shall speak at once, who shall rise from his seat and address the moderator.
10. The person thus speaking shall not be interrupted, except he depart

from the subject, break the rules of decorum, or cast reflection on a brother; in which case he shall be immediately called to order by the moderator.

11. No person shall speak more than twice on the same subject, without leave of the Association.
12. No brother shall be suffered to whisper or laugh during the conference; neither shall he absent himself without leave of the moderator.
13. The moderator shall have the liberty of speaking on any question that may be debated, provided the chair may be previously filled; and have the privilege of voting only when the Association is equally divided.
14. The names of the delegates shall be enrolled by the clerk, and called over as often as the Association may deem expedient.
15. We think it absolutely necessary to have an Association fund, for defraying the expenses of the same; for the raising and supporting of which we think it the duty of each church in the union to contribute such sums as they may deem proper, and send, by the hands of their delegates, to the Association; and the money thus contributed by the churches shall be deposited in the hands of a treasurer; by the Association appointed, who shall be accountable to the Association for all monies by him received and paid out, according to the direction of the same.
16. The Minutes of the Association shall be read, and corrected if necessary, and signed by the moderator and clerk before the Association rises
17. These rules of decorum and gospel order may be altered, changed, or amended, from time to time, or any part of them, when a majority of all the churches in the Association shall deem it necessary; but the articles of faith shall not be subject to any alteration only as respects form.

POWERS OF THE ASSOCIATION

1. It shall be the business of this Association to provide for the general union of the churches.
2. To keep up a friendly correspondence, when convenient, with those Associations of the same faith and order.

3. This Association shall have no power to lord it over God's heritage, nor infringe upon any of the internal rights of the churches.
4. It shall be the duty of this Association to give the churches the best advice in its power in difficult matters; to inquire into any difficulties which may exist between sister churches, and remove them, if possible.
5. To admit any of the brethren in the ministry as assistants, but not to give them the privilege of voting
6. This Association shall have power to withdraw from any churches in the union which may be unsound in principle, or immoral in practice, until reclaimed.
7. To appoint any person or persons, by and with their consent, to transact any business which the Association may deem necessary.
8. The Association shall have power to adjourn to any time or place they may think most proper.
9. The Association shall be opened and close with prayer.

Appendix C

Constitution of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi, 1836

Source: Proceedings of a Meeting to Consider the Propriety of Forming a Baptist State Convention, held in the Baptist Meeting House at Washington, Mississippi, December 23–24, 1836 (Natchez: Stanton & Besancon, 1837), 4–6.

CONSTITUTION

Of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi.

ARTICLE I. This body shall be known by the name of “The Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi,” and shall form the organ of general communication for the denomination throughout the State.

ARTICLE II. The objects of this Convention shall be, to organize and digest an operative system of measures, in relation to Missionary exertions—to support Missionary service among the destitute, both at home and abroad—and to adopt, from time to time, such measures as shall be considered, by the Convention, calculated to promote the general interest of the Redeemer’s Kingdom, particularly within the bounds of this State.

ARTICLE III. Any person contributing ten dollars annually to the Con-

vention shall be a member, or shall have the privilege of appointing a representative. Any person contributing thirty dollars or upwards, at one time, shall be a member for life, with the privilege of appointing a representative, as above; and any person contributing one hundred dollars, or upwards, at one time shall be a Director for life; and every Church, Association, or Missionary Society, contributing ten dollars, shall be entitled to one representative, and an additional representative for every additional ten dollars; but no person shall be entitled to a seat in this Convention, who is not a regular Baptist, in good standing.

[Article III was amended in 1867 to read: “The members of this Convention shall be appointed by the Associations within the State of Mississippi, in the proportion of one delegate to each one hundred members; but one delegate may be received from any church, if the quota of the Association from which it belongs has not been filled; Provided, also, that one delegate may be received by a vote of the Convention assembled from any benevolent Association connected with the Baptist denomination in this State.”]

ARTICLE IV. The Convention shall never possess a single attribute of power or authority over any Church or Association. It absolutely and forever disclaims any right of this kind—hereby avowing that cardinal principle, that every Church is sovereign and independent.

ARTICLE V. The officers of this Convention shall consist of a President, six Vice Presidents, numbered from one to six, a Corresponding Secretary, a Recording Secretary, a Treasurer, and thirty Directors—who, together shall form a Board, of which the President shall be chairman, and in case of his absence, the first Vice President in the order of their election. They shall be nominated by a committee appointed for that purpose, and elected by ballot, annually.

ARTICLE VI. The Chairman, with five other members of the Board, shall form a quorum to do business; in case of the Chairman’s absence, any six members.

ARTICLE VII. The board, in the recess of the Convention, shall have power to transact all business, for the accomplishment of which this Convention has been formed, — shall apply the funds according to their discretion, in all cases where they are not restricted by the special direction of the Society or the donor, -- shall meet as often as the interests of the Society

require, and shall make a detailed report of all their proceedings, at the annual meetings of the Convention, or oftener if required.

ARTICLE VIII. It shall be the duty of the Corresponding Secretary, to conduct the general correspondence of the Convention and of the Board, and report the same to the Board at its regular meetings.

ARTICLE IX. The Recording Secretary shall be responsible for all the papers and documents committed to his care, and shall keep a fair and faithful record of all the proceedings of the Convention.

ARTICLE X. The Treasurer shall take charge of all monies, specialties, and property of any kinds, belonging to the Convention,—shall give sufficient security for the amount in his hands,—keep an authentic record of all the receipts into, and disbursements from the Treasury—specifying particularly for what purpose donations or subscriptions are to be applied by the donors—and exhibit regular accounts of them at the stated meetings of the Convention, and also at the meetings of the Board, when required to do so. He shall pay no money out of the funds, but by order of the Convention or Board, signed by the presiding office, and countersigned by the Secretary.

ARTICLE XI. The annual meeting of the Convention shall be held on Friday before the first Lord's day in May, at such places as the Convention may from time to time determine. The President may, with the advice of ten members of the Board, call a special meeting of the Convention, and with the advice of three of the Directors, call a special meeting of the Board.

[Article XI was amended in 1867 to read: "The annual meetings of the Convention shall be held at such times and places as this Convention may from time to time determine."]

ARTICLE XII. The Convention shall have the power, at their annual meetings, to make such alterations of, and additions to this Constitution, as experience shall dictate, by a majority of two thirds of the members present: *Providing*, That the fourth Article be scrupulously preserved, and that notice be given of the contemplated alteration a year previous.

The meeting then adjourned *sine die*.

R. G. Green, Chairman

L. B. Holloway, Secretary

Appendix D

Historical Table of the Mississippi Baptist Convention

Source: Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2021, 246–250, 252.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Place of Meeting</u>	<u>Presidents</u>	<u>Executives of MBC Board</u>
1836	Washington (Adams Co.)	Ashley Vaughn	
1837	Palestine (Hinds Co.)	Ashley Vaughn	
1838	Hepzibah (Lawrence Co.)	Ashley Vaughn	
1840	Wahalak (Kemper Co.)	Benjamin Whitfield	
1841	Brandon	Benjamin Whitfield	
1842	Tockshish (Pontotoc Co.)	Benjamin Whitfield	
1843	Mound Bluff (Madison Co.)	Benjamin Whitfield	
1844	Palestine (Hinds Co.)	L. B. Holloway	
1845	Grenada	T. N. Waul	
1846	Fellowship (Jefferson Co.)	T. N. Waul	
1847	Hernando	T. N. Waul	
1848	Concord	S. S. Latimer	
1849	Raymond	S. S. Latimer	
1850	Jackson	S. S. Latimer	
1851	Aberdeen	W. L. Balfour	
1852	Clinton	S. S. Latimer	
1853	Columbus	S. S. Latimer	

<u>Year</u>	<u>Place of Meeting</u>	<u>Presidents</u>	<u>Executives of MBC Board</u>
1854	Hernando	William Carey Crane	
1855	Clinton	William Carey Crane	
1856	Oxford	W. C. Buck	
1857	Lexington	J. T. Freeman	
1858	Liberty	J. T. Freeman	
1859	Canton	D. E. Burns	
1860	Natchez	Richard Harrison	
1861	Macon	Richard Harrison	
*1862			
*1863			
1864	Crawfordsville	T. G. Blewett	
1865	Meridian	D. P. Bester	
1866	Jackson	D. P. Bester	
1867	Holly Springs	D. E. Burns	
1868	Meridian	Mark Perrin Lowrey	
1867	Canton	Mark Perrin Lowrey	
1870	West Point	Mark Perrin Lowrey	
1871	Meridian	Mark Perrin Lowrey	
1872	Meridian	Mark Perrin Lowrey	
1873	Aberdeen	Mark Perrin Lowrey	
1874	Oxford	Mark Perrin Lowrey	
1875	Hazlehurst	Mark Perrin Lowrey	
1876	Jackson	Mark Perrin Lowrey	
1877	Starkville	Mark Perrin Lowrey	
1878	Summit	J. T. Freeman	
1879	Grenada	J. T. Freeman	
1880	Okolona	William H. Hardy	
1881	Meridian	William H. Hardy	
1882	Sardis	William H. Hardy	
1883	Crystal Springs	William H. Hardy	
1884	Kosciusko	William H. Hardy	
1885	Aberdeen	William H. Hardy	J. B. Gambrell
1886	Meridian	J. G. Hall	J. B. Gambrell
1887	Oxford	J. G. Hall	J. B. Gambrell and John T. Christian

<u>Year</u>	<u>Place of Meeting</u>	<u>Presidents</u>	<u>Executives of MBC Board</u>
1888	Jackson	J. G. Hall	John T. Christian
1889	West Point	J. G. Hall	John T. Christian
1890	Columbus	W. S. Webb	John T. Christian
1891	Natchez	W. S. Webb	John T. Christian
1892	Meridian	W. S. Webb	John T. Christian
1893	Summit	A. A. Lomax	A. V. Rowe
1894	Winona	A. A. Lomax	A. V. Rowe
1895	Hazlehurst	A. A. Lomax	A. V. Rowe
1896	Starkville	A. A. Lomax	A. V. Rowe
1897	Grenada	A. A. Lomax	A. V. Rowe
1898	Brookhaven	A. A. Lomax	A. V. Rowe
1899	Aberdeen	R. A. Venable	A. V. Rowe
1900	Jackson	R. A. Venable	A. V. Rowe
1901	McComb	H. C. Cohn	A. V. Rowe
1902	Water Valley	H. C. Cohn	A. V. Rowe
1903	Yazoo City	H. F. Sproles	A. V. Rowe
1904	Hattiesburg	H. F. Sproles	A. V. Rowe
1905	Tupelo	H. F. Sproles	A. V. Rowe
1906	Vicksburg	W. T. Ratliff	A. V. Rowe
1907	Hazlehurst	A. H. Longino	A. V. Rowe
1908	Meridian	T. J. Bailey	A. V. Rowe
1909	Winona	T. J. Bailey	A. V. Rowe
1910	Greenwood	W. M. Whittington	A. V. Rowe
1911	Gulfport	W. M. Whittington	A. V. Rowe
1912	Jackson	W. T. Lowrey	A. V. Rowe
1913	Columbus	W. T. Lowrey	A. V. Rowe
1914	Oxford	J. L. Johnson	J. B. Lawrence
1915	Hattiesburg	J. L. Johnson	J. B. Lawrence
1916	Columbus	J. E. Byrd	J. B. Lawrence
1917	Brookhaven	J. E. Byrd	J. B. Lawrence
1918	Meridian	B. G. Lowrey	J. B. Lawrence
1919	Tupelo	B. G. Lowrey	J. B. Lawrence
1920	McComb	A. V. Rowe	J. B. Lawrence
1921	Jackson	A. V. Rowe	R. B. Gunter
1922	Grenada	M. P. L. Love	R. B. Gunter

<u>Year</u>	<u>Place of Meeting</u>	<u>Presidents</u>	<u>Executives of MBC Board</u>
1923	Corinth	M. P. L. Love	R. B. Gunter
1924	Hattiesburg	P. I. Lipsey	R. B. Gunter
1925	New Albany	P. I. Lipsey	R. B. Gunter
1926	Jackson	J. P. Williams	R. B. Gunter
1927	Grenada	J. P. Williams	R. B. Gunter
1928	Meridian	L. G. Gates	R. B. Gunter
1929	Canton	L. G. Gates	R. B. Gunter
**1930	Water Valley	W. E. Holcomb	R. B. Gunter
1931	Columbus	W. E. Holcomb	R. B. Gunter
1932	Gulfport	B. Simmons	R. B. Gunter
1933	Tupelo	B. Simmons	R. B. Gunter
1934	Laurel	D. M. Nelson	R. B. Gunter
1935	Meridian	D. M. Nelson	R. B. Gunter
1936	Natchez	Frank Moody Purser	R. B. Gunter
1937	Philadelphia	Frank Moody Purser	R. B. Gunter
1938	Jackson	L. T. Lowrey	D. A. McCall
1939	Jackson	L. T. Lowrey	D. A. McCall
1940	Jackson	R. B. Gunter	D. A. McCall
1941	Meridian	R. B. Gunter	D. A. McCall
1942	Jackson	R. B. Gunter	D. A. McCall
1943	Jackson	E. C. Williams	D. A. McCall
1944	Jackson	E. C. Williams	D. A. McCall
1945	Jackson	Norman W. Cox	D. A. McCall
1946	Jackson	Norman W. Cox	D. A. McCall
1947	Jackson	Auber J. Wilde	D. A. McCall
1948	Jackson	Auber J. Wilde	D. A. McCall
1949	Jackson	W. E. Greene	D. A. McCall
1950	Jackson	W. E. Greene	Chester L. Quarles
1951	Jackson	Purser Hewitt	Chester L. Quarles
1952	Jackson	Purser Hewitt	Chester L. Quarles
1953	Jackson	John E. Barnes	Chester L. Quarles
1954	Jackson	John E. Barnes	Chester L. Quarles
1955	Jackson	Owen Cooper	Chester L. Quarles
1956	Jackson	Owen Cooper	Chester L. Quarles
1957	Jackson	S. R. Woodson	Chester L. Quarles

<u>Year</u>	<u>Place of Meeting</u>	<u>Presidents</u>	<u>Executives of MBC Board</u>
1958	Jackson	S. R. Woodson	Chester L. Quarles
1959	Jackson	M. F. Rayburn	Chester L. Quarles
1960	Jackson	M. F. Rayburn	Chester L. Quarles
1961	Jackson	W. Douglas Hudgins	Chester L. Quarles
1962	Jackson	W. Douglas Hudgins	Chester L. Quarles
1963	Jackson	Russell Bush, Jr.	Chester L. Quarles
1964	Jackson	Russell Bush, Jr.	Chester L. Quarles
1965	Jackson	Earl Kelly	Chester L. Quarles
1966	Jackson	Earl Kelly	Chester L. Quarles
1967	Jackson	Claude Townsend	Chester L. Quarles
1968	Jackson	Claude Townsend	Chester L. Quarles
1969	Jackson	John G. McCall	W. Douglas Hudgins
1970	Jackson	John G. McCall	W. Douglas Hudgins
1971	Jackson	Glenn Perry	W. Douglas Hudgins
1972	Jackson	Glenn Perry	W. Douglas Hudgins
1973	Jackson	David Grant	W. Douglas Hudgins
1974	Jackson	David Grant	Earl Kelly
1975	Jackson	James Richardson	Earl Kelly
1976	Jackson	James Richardson	Earl Kelly
1977	Jackson	Robert L. Hamblin	Earl Kelly
1978	Jackson	Robert L. Hamblin	Earl Kelly
1979	Jackson	Bill Causey	Earl Kelly
1980	Jackson	Bill Causey	Earl Kelly
1981	Jackson	Brooks Wester	Earl Kelly
1982	Jackson	James F. Yates	Earl Kelly
1983	Jackson	James F. Yates	Earl Kelly
1984	Jackson	Charles Pickering	Earl Kelly
1985	Jackson	Charles Pickering	Earl Kelly
1986	Jackson	Frank Gunn	Earl Kelly
1987	Jackson	Frank Gunn	Earl Kelly
1988	Jackson	Jim Futral	Earl Kelly
1989	Jackson	Jim Futral	Earl Kelly and Bill Causey
1990	Jackson	Eddie Hamilton	Bill Causey
1991	Jackson	Eddie Hamilton	Bill Causey
1992	Jackson	W. W. Walley	Bill Causey

<u>Year</u>	<u>Place of Meeting</u>	<u>Presidents</u>	<u>Executives of MBC Board</u>
1993	Jackson	W. W. Walley	Bill Causey
1994	Jackson	Rex Yancey	Bill Causey
1995	Jackson	Rex Yancey	Bill Causey
1996	Jackson	Jimmy Porter	Bill Causey
1997	Jackson	Jimmy Porter	Bill Causey
1998	Jackson	Dean Register	Bill Causey and Jim Futral
1999	Jackson	Dean Register	Jim Futral
2000	Jackson	Kermit McGregor	Jim Futral
2001	Jackson	Kermit McGregor	Jim Futral
2002	Jackson	Frank Pollard	Jim Futral
2003	Jackson	Frank Pollard	Jim Futral
2004	Jackson	Gene Henderson	Jim Futral
2005	Jackson	Gene Henderson	Jim Futral
2006	Jackson	Clarence Cooper, Jr.	Jim Futral
2007	Jackson	Clarence Cooper, Jr.	Jim Futral
2008	Jackson	Mickey Dalrymple	Jim Futral
2009	Jackson	Mickey Dalrymple	Jim Futral
2010	Jackson	Gary Richardson	Jim Futral
2011	Jackson	Gary Richardson	Jim Futral
2012	Jackson	David Hamilton	Jim Futral
2013	Jackson	David Hamilton	Jim Futral
2014	Jackson	Matt Buckles	Jim Futral
2015	Jackson	Matt Buckles	Jim Futral
2016	Jackson	Doug Broome	Jim Futral
2017	Jackson	Doug Broome	Jim Futral
2018	Jackson	Mark Vincent	Jim Futral
2019	Jackson	Mark Vincent	Jim Futral
***2020		Ken Hester	Shawn Parker
2021	Jackson	Ken Hester	Shawn Parker
2022	Jackson	Lloyd Sweatt	Shawn Parker

**The convention did not meet in 1862 or 1863 due to the Civil War*

***Two special sessions of the convention were held in 1930: one in Jackson on April 24, 1930, and one in Newton on July 15, 1930.*

****The 2020 convention was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Notes

CHAPTER 1 NOTES

¹ Jesse L. Boyd, *A Popular History of the Baptists in Mississippi* (Jackson: The Baptist Press), 1930, 5.

² H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press), 1987, 32–34.

³ *Ibid.*, 38, 124–30, 143–144. Jesse L. Boyd, *A History of Baptists in America Prior to 1845* (New York, 1957), 17–22; Joe M. King, *A History of South Carolina Baptists* (Columbia, SC, 1964), 10–13.

⁴ T. M. Bond, *A Republication of the Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association 1806–1847*. (New Orleans: 1849), 4.

⁵ Richard Aubrey McLemore, *A History of Mississippi Baptists, 1780–1970* (Jackson: Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, 1971), 4–5.

⁶ Minutes, Welsh Neck Baptist Church 1737–1935. Courtesy of the Darlington County (S.C.) Historical Commission and Museum.

⁷ Jack Curtis, *Curtis Lingering Shadows*, n.p., 3.

⁸ John Griffing Jones, *A Concise History of the Introduction of Protestantism into Mississippi and the Southwest* (St. Louis: P.M. Pinckard, 1866), 45; Lewis-Mosely Genealogy, accessed January 2, 2022, lewis-genealogy.org/genealogy/Lewis/Moseley-1.htm.

⁹ Jack Curtis, *Fearless, Faithful, Forgotten: Richard Curtis, Jr. 1755-1811*, n.p., 3; Leah Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists, 1670–1805* (Florence, S.C., 1935), 61–110.

¹⁰ Jones, 23–24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 24–25; Curtis, *Fearless, Faithful, Forgotten*, 13; Westley F. Bubee, Jr. *Mississippi: A History*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 32.

¹² Jones, 25–26.

¹³ Jones, 26–27; Curtis, *Fearless, Faithful, Forgotten*, 13. We know that it took American commissioner Andrew Ellicott five months to go by boat from Pittsburgh to Natchez in 1796–1797, so

there is no reason to think that the Baptist pioneers could have made a trip of a similar distance from Kingsport to Natchez any sooner in 1780–1781.

¹⁴ Jones, 27–28.

¹⁵ Ibid, 30.

¹⁶ Ibid, 11–18.

¹⁷ Curtis, *Fearless, Faithful, Forgotten*, 1, 13; Jones, 30–31; T. M. Bond, 12; Jerusalem Lutheran Church Records, Effingham County, Georgia, October 1774, 62; Certificate of Marriage of John Lanier and Elizabeth Ryan, July 29, 1796, at Natchez, Diocese of Baton Rouge, Vol. SJBR-84B, 20–20A; “Salem Baptist Church Minute Book” (Manuscript and microfilm copy in Library of Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission); “Ebenezer Baptist Minute Book,” Amite County, MS, May 9, 1806. The Ebenezer Minute Book refers to their founding members, including Richard and Mary Curtis, as coming from “Cole’s Creek Church,” in May 1806. However, the Mississippi Baptist Association minutes of September 1807 listed the name of the church as “Salem.”

¹⁸ Curtis, *Fearless, Faithful, Forgotten*, 19, 24.

¹⁹ “Census of the District of Natchez for the year 1792.” (Mississippi Provincial Archives: Spanish Dominion; IV, 788. Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.)

²⁰ Jones, 31–33; Bond, 4; Curtis, *Fearless, Faithful, Forgotten*, 127, 146.

²¹ Curtis, *Fearless, Faithful, Forgotten*, 46; Arthur Preston Whitaker, *The Mississippi Question, 1795–1803: A Study in Trade, Politics and Diplomacy* (Gloucester, Mass., 1962), 61–63.

²² D. Clayton Jones, *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 39.

²³ Jones, 34.

²⁴ Jones, 33–34; Boyd, 21–22; Curtis, *Fearless, Faithful, Forgotten*, 46.

²⁵ Jones, 35; Bond, 4.

²⁶ Curtis, *Fearless, Faithful, Forgotten*, 46; Jones, 35–36.

²⁷ Curtis, *Fearless, Faithful, Forgotten*, 64.

²⁸ George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 364–374.

²⁹ Curtis, *Fearless, Faithful, Forgotten*, 46.

³⁰ Ibid, 65.

³¹ Ibid, 46.

³² Ibid, 38.

³³ Ibid, 65.

³⁴ Jones, 37–43; Bond, 4–5; In 1866, John Griffing Jones wrote these words about Chloe Holt: “Whoever may, in future, write the history of the Baptist Church in Mississippi, let them not forget to make honorable mention of Chloe Holt.” We fulfilled your request, Mr. Jones, in the spirit of Mark 14:9.

³⁵ Curtis, *Fearless, Faithful, Forgotten*, 46, 53.

³⁶ Jones, 45; Bond, 5, 12, 14–26; Leah Townsend, chapter 2, accessed January 15, 2022, at generalogytrails.com/scar/baptist_churches4.htm; Minutes, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Amite Co., Mississippi, 9 May 1806, 31 July 1806. Jones spells the name of the South Carolina minister who helped ordain Richard Curtis as Mathew McCullans, but Charleston association in South Carolina spelled his name Matthew McCullers. David Cooper was pastor of Ebenezer Baptist in Florence, South Carolina, 1795–1798 during the time that Richard Curtis returned to South Carolina, and later Cooper was pastor of the church Curtis founded in Mississippi, Salem Baptist on Coles Creek, 1808–1811, according to minutes of the Charleston association in South Carolina

and Mississippi Baptist Association. When Cooper arrived in Mississippi, he was immediately made moderator and charged with writing the association's annual "circular letter," indicating his prominence and acceptance.

³⁷ Bond, 5; Certificate of Marriage of John Lanier and Elizabeth Ryan, July 29, 1796, at Natchez, Diocese of Baton Rouge, Vol. SJBR-84B, 20-20A.

³⁸ James, 62-64.

³⁹ Bond, 5; Boyd, 75.

⁴⁰ James, 64-69.

⁴¹ James, 70-74; Bond, 5.

⁴² Bond, 6.

⁴³ Jones, 46-48.

CHAPTER 2 NOTES

¹ "An Ordinance for the Government of Territory of the United States, North-West of the River Ohio," 1787. New York, s.n., 1787.

² Westley F. Busbee, Jr., *Mississippi: A History*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 53-64.

³ Ralph D. Cross, ed., *Atlas of Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1974), 36-39.

⁴ Chares D. Lowrey, "The Great Migration to the Mississippi Territory 1798-1819," in *A Mississippi Reader: Selected Articles from The Journal of Mississippi History*, John Edmond Gonzales, ed., Jackson: Mississippi Historical Society, 1980, 72; Cross, 36-39; Dennis J. Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 40-41; Busbee, 64-68; United States Census accessed January 22, 2022, at [census.gov](https://www.census.gov). These figures only show the population of the lands within the present state of Mississippi. In the 1800 and 1810 censuses, the Mississippi Territory included land now in Alabama, since Alabama was not counted separately until Mississippi became a state in 1817. In 1800, there were 7,600 people in the portion of the territory now in Mississippi and 1,250 in the area which is now in Alabama. In 1810, there were 31,306 people in what is now Mississippi and 9,046 in what is now Alabama.

⁵ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 416, 431, 442-443.

⁶ Z. T. Leavell and T. J. Bailey, *A Complete History of Mississippi Baptists from the Earliest Times* (Jackson: 1904), I, 72-73; Jesse L. Boyd, *A Popular History of the Baptists in Mississippi* (Jackson: The Baptist Press, 1930), 26-27; T. M. Bond, *A Republication of the Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association* (New Orleans: Hinton & Co., 1849), 12-26; Minutes, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Amite County, Mississippi, May 9, 1806, November 1, 1806.

⁷ In publications from Woodville Baptist Church, the congregation claims a connection to Bethel Baptist Church, founded in 1800 south of Woodville, and therefore claims it existed since 1800. However, the evidence indicates Bethel and Woodville were never the same congregation. The Mississippi Baptist Association met several times at Bethel, but the records always named the location as Bethel Baptist Church, Wilkinson County, rather than Woodville. A "Baptist Meeting House" was built sometime in Woodville and chartered in 1824. Interestingly, the 1827 meeting of the Mississippi association met "at Woodville." This is significant, because associational minutes did not say at Woodville church, only that it met at the town, apparently the new Baptist Meeting House. Delegates from Bethel church, south of Woodville, were at the 1827 associational meeting in Woodville, but we know they did not meet at Bethel church because if they

had, the minutes would have worded it that way. (In 1821, the Mississippi association met “at Bethel, Wilkinson County;” this was three years before the charter of the Baptist Meeting House in Woodville.) On May 5, 1832, the *Southern Planter*, published at Woodville, reported that Rev. Courtney (probably Ezra Courtney) preached at Bethel Baptist on the third Sunday of May and on each Sunday of May at Woodville Baptist, indicating they were two separate congregations at that time. Bethel ceased to exist sometime in the 1830s. In 1853, the Baptists reorganized the church in the town of Woodville and took the Bethel name, but it was not the same congregation. In September 1956, O. B. Beverly, pastor of Woodville Baptist Church, wrote to J. L. Boyd, executive director of the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission, making an inaccurate claim about the date of construction of the Woodville Baptist building. Beverly falsely claimed that the 1827 and 1828 minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association said that the Woodville Baptist building was built in 1809. When Boyd refuted this, Beverly wrote another letter the same month, this time falsely claiming that the 1809 Woodville Baptist construction date was mentioned in the 1927 and 1928 minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association. In fact, there are no such references in any of those minutes. Despite this, Beverly continued to perpetuate the inaccurate construction date of 1809 in the Woodville Baptist Church bulletin and other publications originating from the Woodville church. Minutes, Ebenezer Baptist Church, May 9, 1806; Charter of Woodville Baptist Meeting House, January 7, 1824; *Southern Planter*, May 5, 1832, 2; Minutes, Woodville Baptist Church, September 6, 1853; Bond, 80, 110. Letter from O. B. Beverly to J. L. Boyd, September 8, 1956; Letter from O. B. Beverly to J. L. Boyd, September 30, 1956; Woodville Baptist Church file, Archives, Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission.

⁸ Bond, 6–12; Minutes, Ebenezer Baptist Church, July 5, 1806, January 31, 1807. T. M. Bond, writing in 1849, refers to the date of the first meeting of the association as being in September 1806, but the church minutes of Ebenezer Baptist Church, written July 5, 1806, are very specific, giving the names of “Ezra Courtney, Mark Cole, Batson Morgan, James Mumford, & Rees Perkins” who were elected to “attend as visitants at a conference at Cole’s Creek Church on Friday before the first Sunday in August,” which puts the first meeting on August 1, 1806. The Ebenezer minutes then say on January 31, 1807, that “Rev. Ezra Courtney and Mark Cole were appointed to attend a conference at Coles Creek Church to be held on Feb the 27th for the purpose of forming an Association.”

⁹ Bond, 12.

¹⁰ Ibid, 7–11.

¹¹ Ibid, 11, 16, 20, 25–26.

¹² Ibid, 17–20, 35, 42, 44–47.

¹³ McBeth, 203–206; 229; 242.

¹⁴ Bond, 28, 64.

¹⁵ Bond, 7–9; William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 358–359.

¹⁶ Bond, 12.

¹⁷ Busbee, 64–65; Bond, 34–40, 264. War often caused people to think about their eternal destiny. Chapter 7 will discuss how many people came to Christ during the Civil War.

¹⁸ Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Valley Forge, PA: 1963), 249–251; Bond, 59–60.

¹⁹ Bond, 12–222, 264.

²⁰ Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America* (New York: Oxford University Press), 80; Glen Lee Greene, *House Upon a Rock: About Southern Baptists in Louisiana* (Alexandria,

Louisiana: Executive Board of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, 1973), 53–55; Minutes, Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson) on Coles Creek, August 18, 1821; Minutes, Ebenezer Baptist Church, (Amite), December 8, 1815; Minutes, Sarepta Baptist Church (Franklin), November 1816, December 1822.

²¹ Randy J. Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 91; Bond, 36, 42, 50, 56, 60, 66, 70, 72, 87.

²² Busbee, 76; Sparks, 78, 91.

²³ Ibid; Minutes, Union Baptist Association, 1828.

²⁴ Bond, 48; Aaron Menikoff, *Politics and Piety: Baptist Social Reform in America, 1770–1860* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 93–94.

²⁵ Bond, 42, 48, 72–74.

²⁶ Randy J. Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 123–124; Minutes, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Amite County, Mississippi, December 18, 1858. Minutes, Bethesda Baptist Church, Hinds County, Mississippi, March 19, 1858. In March and April 1858, Ebenezer church investigated rumors that a member had killed an enslaved girl of another member but dismissed the matter after getting testimony from the slaveowner and a physician that the death was an accident. In 1859, Bethesda Church in Hinds County did record church discipline of “Bro. T. Martin for striking with a stick and whipping a Negro boy of John H. Collins,” however the issue seemed to be as much a matter of Martin interfering with Collins’s “property” as the fact that he hit the enslaved child. There were a few examples of White Baptists in the South who opposed slavery, such as John Leland, who led Virginia Baptists to speak publicly against slavery in the 1790s, and David Barrow in Kentucky, who wrote a pamphlet against slavery in 1808. Carter Tarrant, an anti-slavery Baptist preacher from Kentucky and friend of David Barrow, preached to the Mississippi Baptist Association in 1815. However, after the rise of the abolition movement in the 1830s, White Baptists in the South, especially the Deep South, became entrenched in their defense of slavery.

²⁷ Bond, 60, 71. Clara Sue Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818–1918* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 100–113.

²⁸ John T. Christian, *A History of the Baptists* (Nashville, 1922), II, 338; “Report on the Committee on Public Lands, on ... Petition ... of the Baptist Church at Salem in Mississippi Territory,” January 7, 1811. (Copy in the Salem Church Folder, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson).

²⁹ Bond, 48, 50; Minutes, Salem Baptist Church, March 2, 1816.

³⁰ Minutes, Salem Baptist Church, 1st Sunday in February 1819, 1st Sunday in June 1820, 1st Sunday in September 1820.

³¹ Ibid, June 30, 1821, September 28, 1822, November 2, 1822, January 4, 1823, August 29, 1834. According to historian Jesse L. Boyd, a Black Baptist congregation built a wooden sanctuary on the property of the old Salem church in the early 1900s. In more recent years, a brick sanctuary was erected at the location and took the name Salem Baptist, but it is not same congregation as the original. Jesse L. Boyd, *A Popular History of the Baptists in Mississippi* (Jackson: The Baptist Press, 1930), 34–35.

³² Bond, 12–26, John G. Jones, *A Concise History of the Introduction of Protestantism into Mississippi and the Southwest* (St. Louis: P. M. Pinckard, 1866), 49; Boyd, 23, 74; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1876, 20–21. After being so prominent among Mississippi Baptists, Curtis faded into the background around the time the association was organized. Curtis was pastor of

Ebenezer Baptist Church in Amite County when Ebenezer elected representatives to attend the first two meetings at Salem church to form an association, but Curtis himself was not chosen to attend. Curtis also did not attend the first official meeting of the association at Bethel in 1807. Curtis was present at the associational meetings in 1808, 1810, and 1811 but did not attend in 1809 when the association met at Salem. However, Curtis only appeared as a representative from New Hope church; he was never listed among the numerous preachers who gave sermons, never elected to any position of leadership, and never served on a committee of the association.

³³ John T. Christian, *History of the Baptists of Mississippi*, 55; Bond, 30–34, 65; L. S. Foster, *Mississippi Baptist Preachers* (St. Louis: National Baptist Publishing Company, 1895), 328.

³⁴ Bond, 71, Foster 492–493.

³⁵ Christian, 57; Bond, 51–55, 58, 70, 86, 90, 129; Minutes, Salem Baptist Church, 1824–1830; March 22, 1830.

³⁶ Minutes, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Amite County, May 9, 1806, July 5, 1806, July 25, 1806, May 2, 1807, June 4, 1808; Bond, 8–9, 26–29 34, 35, 41, 48–49, 59, 60, 64, 89, 94; Foster, 166; Glen Lee Greene, *House Upon a Rock: About Southern Baptists in Louisiana* (Alexandria: Executive Board of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, 1974), 45–47; Boyd, 78–79.

CHAPTER 3 NOTES

¹ William K. Scarborough, “Heartland of the Cotton Kingdom” in *A History of Mississippi*, Richard A. McLemore, ed., (Hattiesburg: University & College Press of Mississippi, 1973), 321; Westley F. Busbee, Jr., *Mississippi: A History*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 76–77, 83, 94, 102.

² McLemore, Richard A., and Nannie P. McLemore, *The Mississippi Story* (Chicago, 1969).

³ Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1963), 250; John T. Christian, *A History of the Baptists*, 2 vols. (Nashville, 1922), II, 3992.

⁴ T. M. Bond, *A Republican of the Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association* (New Orleans: Hinton & Co., 1849), 70; 264.

⁵ Leavell and Bailey, *A Complete History of Mississippi Baptists from the Earliest Times*, 2 vols., (Jackson, 1903), I, 72–74; Minutes, Union Baptist Association, 1842. The minutes of 1842 cite the original minutes of September 18, 1820, noting the 1820 minutes were “worth preserving” since the 1820 minutes were already “very scarce” in 1842.

⁶ Minutes, Pearl River Baptist Association, 1820, 1836.

⁷ Richard Furman, “Address at Formation of the Triennial Convention,” *Proceedings of the Baptist Convention for Missionary Purposes* (Philadelphia, n.p., 1814), 38–43; Jesse L. Boyd, *A History of Baptists in America Prior to 1845*, (New York, 1957), 186.

⁸ Leavell and Bailey, I, 134–135; Bond, 84; Minutes, Pearl River Association, 1824; “The Second Annual Report of the Mississippi Baptist State Convention in Session at East Fork Church, Amite County, Nov. 12th and 13th, 1824” (Natchez, 1825).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid; Minutes, Pearl River Baptist Association, 1830.

¹¹ Bond, 140.

¹² Walter B. Posey, *The Baptist Church in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1776–1845* (Lexington, 1957), 69.

¹³ Bond, 12; Benjamin Griffin, *History of the Primitive Baptists of Mississippi* (Jackson: Barksdale and Jones, 1853), 65–66, 155–157, 159–161. Griffin gives the name Joseph Erwin as a founder

- of the Primitive Baptist Association in 1839 and identifies him as the same person as the John Erwin listed in 1807 in the minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association.
- ¹⁴ “The Second Annual Report of the Mississippi Baptist State Convention,” 1825. The entire text of this circular letter is reprinted by Richard Aubrey McLemore, *A History of Mississippi Baptists, 1780-1970* (Jackson: Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, 1971), 80–87.
- ¹⁵ Boyd, *A Popular History*, 50.
- ¹⁶ Griffin, 66.
- ¹⁷ Ibid, 65.
- ¹⁸ Christian, *A History of Baptists in the United States*, II, 422.
- ¹⁹ Christian, 431; Torbet, 272–274.
- ²⁰ Christian, “A History of the Baptists of Mississippi,” (An unpublished manuscript, Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission, 1924), 120; Winfred E. Garrison and Alfred T. De Groot, *The Disciples of Christ: A History* (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1954), 290.
- ²¹ Bond, 127–129, 162.
- ²² Minutes, Pearl River Baptist Association, 1830.
- ²³ John T. Christian, “A History of the Baptists of Mississippi,” 124. Minutes, Sarepta Baptist Church, Jefferson County, Mississippi, May 1839.
- ²⁴ Christian, 124; Minutes, Woodville Baptist Church, September 6, 1853.
- ²⁵ Boyd, 54.
- ²⁶ Aaron Menikoff, *Politics and Piety: Baptist Social Reform in America, 1770–1860* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 162–163; T.C. Schilling, *Abstract History of the Mississippi Baptist Association for One Hundred Years From its Preliminary Organization in 1806 to the Centennial Session in 1906* (New Orleans, 1908), 50; Minutes, Pearl River Association, 1830, 1831, 1832.
- ²⁷ Bond, 65; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 557; John Griffing Jones, *A Concise History*, 58–60; Minutes, Providence Baptist Church, July 9, 1842. Manuscript copy, Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission.
- ²⁸ Minutes, Sarepta Baptist Church, August 1815, June 1828, July 1828.
- ²⁹ Minutes, Ebenezer Baptist Church, February 6, 1813; March 6, 1813; Minutes, Union Baptist Association, 1828.
- ³⁰ Minutes, Providence Baptist Church, December 10, 1842, September 2, 1843.
- ³¹ George Hammon, *Syons Redemption, and Original Sin Vindicated* (London: G. Dawson, 1658), 9-10; Minutes, Salem Baptist Church, April 1819, June 1819; Minutes, Providence Baptist Church, June 2, 1821.
- ³² Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1836 (Quoting Allen’s *Triennial Baptist Register*); Sparks, Randy J., *Religion in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 106.

CHAPTER 4 NOTES

- ¹ Ashley Vaughn’s tombstone in Natchez Cemetery states that he died on “March 29th, 1839, in the 32nd year of his age;” Minutes, Clear Creek Baptist Church, Adams County, Mississippi, December 12, 1835; *Southwestern Religious Luminary*, December 1837; C.B. Hamlett, III, “Ashley Vaughn,” *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, II, 1442. Hamlett incorrectly states that Vaughn “served as a missionary of the American Baptist Home Mission Society.” However, the society did not record an appointment of Vaughn nor correspond with Vaughn and did not begin work in Mississippi until after his arrival. Vaughn himself criticized the American Baptist Home Mission Society in 1837 for having only one missionary in Mississippi under appointment, saying, “nor do we know

indeed that he has accepted of the appointment.”

- ² John T. Christian, “A History of the Baptists of Mississippi” (Unpublished manuscript, 1924), 124; Minutes, Clear Creek Baptist Church, January 9, 1836, March 12, 1836, July 10, 1836; Frances Allen Cabaniss and James Allen Cabaniss, “Religion in Ante-Bellum Mississippi,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 6 (October 1944): 205; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1837, 25–28.
- ³ *Southwestern Religious Luminary*, September 1836, November 1836; T. M. Bond, *A Republication of the Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association* (New Orleans: Hinton & Co., 1849), 172.
- ⁴ *Southwestern Religious Luminary*, September 1836.
- ⁵ “Proceedings of a Meeting to Consider the Propriety of Forming a Baptist State Convention, held in the Baptist Meeting House at Washington, Mississippi, 23rd and 24th December 1836” (Natchez: Stanton & Besancon, 1837), 3–8.
- ⁶ William D. McCain, *The Story of Jackson: A History of the Capitol of Mississippi, 1821–1951* (Jackson, 1953), 55; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1844.
- ⁷ “Proceedings of a Meeting,” 5–6.
- ⁸ Minutes, Sarepta Baptist Church, Jefferson County, Mississippi, August 1837, September 1837.
- ⁹ “Proceedings of a Meeting,” 5; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1846.
- ¹⁰ Robert A. Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People, 1607–1972* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974), 98, 105.
- ¹¹ “Proceedings of a Meeting,” 12.
- ¹² Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1837–1846; Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, 3rd ed., (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1963), 278–279.
- ¹³ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1845.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1839, 1840.
- ¹⁵ *Mississippi Republican*, July 2, 1817; *Mississippi State Gazette*, January 10, 1818; Bond, 66; Minutes, Union Baptist Association, 1828.
- ¹⁶ “Proceedings of a Meeting,” 10; *Southwestern Religious Luminary*, September 1836, February 1837, January 1838; Minutes, Clear Creek Church, March 11, 1837; *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette* (Judge George W. Armstrong Library; Natchez, Mississippi, text-fiche), December 22, 1836, February 2, 1837, February 24, 1837; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1837, 1839; Tombstone of Ashley Vaughn, Natchez Cemetery.
- ¹⁷ Foster, 23–24; Minutes, Clear Creek Church, July 9, 1839, December 6, 1839; “A History of the Baptists of Natchez,” Minutes, Union Baptist Association, 1843–1855.
- ¹⁸ Minutes, Clear Creek Church, February 12, 1843, March 23, 1844; Foster, 24, Minutes, Union Association, 1844–1846.
- ¹⁹ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1844.
- ²⁰ Foster, 385; McCain, 151; “Runnels, Hiram George,” Texas State Historical Association, accessed January 6, 2024 at tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/runnels-hiram-george.
- ²¹ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1840, 1844, 1845, 1846.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 1838, 1845, 1846.
- ²³ Glenn M. Linden, et. al, *Legacy of Freedom: A History of the United States* (Dallas: Laidlaw Publishers, 1986), 245–247.
- ²⁴ “Proceedings of a Meeting,” 7.
- ²⁵ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1836, 1837, 1838, 1845.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1837.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1840, 1841, 1842, 1843, 1844, 1845.

- ²⁸ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 425; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1839–1842, 1846.
- ²⁹ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1843; Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America*, 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981), 143; Minutes, Clear Creek Baptist Church, March 11, 1837; August 14, 1845; Jesse L. Boyd, *A Popular History of the Baptists in Mississippi* (Jackson: The Baptist Press, 1930), 31; L. S. Foster, *Mississippi Baptist Preachers* (St. Louis: National Baptist Publishing Company, 1894), 572; Minutes, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Amite County, Mississippi, November 19, 1836; November 20, 1836; November 21, 1836.
- ³⁰ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1838, 1839; Minutes, Providence Baptist Church, Forrest County, Mississippi, May 11, 1844; January 11, 1845; March 8, 1845.
- ³¹ Aaron Menikoff, *Politics and Piety: Baptist Social Reform in America, 1770–1860*, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 105–109, 119. The invention of the telegraph in 1844 led to the end of Sunday delivery, as it was then possible to get urgent news and market information without mail. By the 1850s, the postmaster general eliminated Sunday delivery for economic reasons. The mail still moved on Sunday, but it was not delivered.
- ³² Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1840; Minutes, Providence Church, March 4, 1837; Minutes, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Amite County, Mississippi, October 18, 1851, November 15, 1851.
- ³³ Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994) 39–40; Ahlstrom, 654.
- ³⁴ Minutes, Hopewell Baptist Church, Lafayette County, Mississippi, July 17, 1841, August 1846, July 1847; Bond, 42, 48.
- ³⁵ Minutes, Bethesda Baptist Church, Hinds County, Mississippi, September 20, 1846; Emma Morehead Whitfield, comp., *Whitfield, Bryan, Smith and Related Families*, Book One. Whitefield, edited by Theodore Marshall Whitfield (Westminister, MD, 1948), 89–93. Minutes, Hepzibah Baptist Church, Clarke County, Mississippi, November 1840, March 20, 1841; Bond, 72–74.
- ³⁶ Ahlstrom, 659–660, 663–664; Torbet, 288–291.
- ³⁷ Torbet, 291.
- ³⁸ Torbet, 292–293; Fletcher, 45–52.
- ³⁹ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1842, 1845.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 1845.

CHAPTER 5 NOTES

- ¹ *Natchez (Miss.) Daily Courier*, May 25, 1860.
- ² Jno. T. Buck, *History of Mississippi Baptist State Convention* (Jackson: 1883), 5; Samuel Hill, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1894, 486–487; Jesse L. Boyd, *A Popular History of the Baptists in Mississippi* (Jackson: The Baptist Press, 1930), 190; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1860, 60–61. When looking at monetary contributions in the nineteenth century, be aware that \$1 in 1850 was worth then what approximately \$35–\$40 was worth in 2022.
- ³ Glenn M. Linden, et. al., *Legacy of Freedom: A History of the United States* (River Forest, Illinois: Laidlaw Brothers, Publishers, 1986, 308, 773; Thomas S. Kidd, *American History, Volume 1, 1492–1877* (Nashville: B & H Academic), 221.
- ⁴ William Wright Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention, 1845–1953* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1954), 26–27.

- ⁵ *Annals, Southern Baptist Convention, 1845–1861.*
- ⁶ *Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1846.*
- ⁷ *Ibid, 1846, 1851, 1861.*
- ⁸ William Wright Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention, 1845–1953* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1954), 39; *Annals, Southern Baptist Convention, 1845, 1853*; *Minutes, Hephzibah Baptist Church, Clarke County, Mississippi, September 9, 1854*; *Minutes, Bethesda Baptist Church, Hinds County, Mississippi, February 1852, October 1852.*
- ⁹ *Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1849, 23, 27; 1859, 27–28*; O. B. Beverly, “Notes on Woodville Baptist Church” (a file in possession of the Reverend O. B. Beverly of Woodville, Mississippi), 1853, cited in Lewis, Bruce, “A History of Woodville Baptist Church” (Unpublished thesis, 1971). Boyd, J. L., “A History of Batesville Baptist Church,” (Unpublished document, 1964, at the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission). A study of the minutes of the following churches found no reference to a Sunday school prior to 1861: Ebenezer Church, Amite County; Clear Creek Church, Adams County; Sarepta Church, Franklin County; Bethesda Church, Hinds County; Providence Church, Forrest County; Hephzibah Church, Clarke County; Hopewell Church, Lafayette County.
- ¹⁰ *Minutes, Bethesda Baptist Church, Hinds County, Mississippi, August 1846, March 1853, August 20, 1859*; J.L. Boyd, “A History of Batesville Baptist Church,” (Unpublished document, 1964, at the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission).
- ¹¹ *Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1843, 10; 1844, 15, 1845, 20; 1852, 35.*
- ¹² *Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1848, 13–14; 1849, 49.*
- ¹³ Charles E. Martin, *Mississippi College with Pride: A History of Mississippi College 1826–2004* (Clinton, MS: Mississippi College, 2007), 7–8; Board of Trustees of Mississippi College, *Minute Books I, 3, 5, 7*. Also see Isaac Caldwell to John A. Quitman, April 11, 1828, in Jesse L. Boyd, *Good Reasons for a History of Mississippi College*, 6–7. These materials are in the archives, Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission, Leland Speed Library, Mississippi College, Clinton, Mississippi.
- ¹⁴ “Mississippi College Timeline,” accessed April 30, 2022 at mc.edu/about/history/timeline; Martin, 14; Aubrey Keith Lucas, “Education in Mississippi from Statehood to the Civil War,” in *A History of Mississippi*, vol. 1, Richard Aubrey McLemore, ed. (Hattiesburg: University and College Press of Mississippi, 1973), 360–361.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*; W. H. Weathersby, “A History of Mississippi College,” *Publications of Mississippi Historical Society, Centenary Series, V*, 184–219. Also see *Minute Book I*, 51, 56.
- ¹⁶ U.S. Census, “Population of the United States in 1850: Mississippi,” accessed April 30, 2022, at census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1850/1850a/1850a-34.pdf. The population of Clinton is not even listed in 1850. In 1860, Clinton is listed as having 289 citizens. U.S. Census, “Population of the United States in 1860: Mississippi,” accessed April 30, 2022, at census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1860/population/1860a-22.pdf; Board of Trustees of Mississippi College, *Minute Book I*, 88–90; *Clinton News*, Dec. 1967; *Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1850, 27.*
- ¹⁷ *Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1850*; Board of Trustees of Mississippi College, *Minute Book I*, 94–235.
- ¹⁸ *Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1852, 13, 21–22; 1858, 23.*
- ¹⁹ *Ibid, 1853, 6, 7, 16–20; 1860, 12, 33–37.*
- ²⁰ *Ibid, 1852, 23–24.*

- ²¹ Minutes, Central Baptist Association, 1853, 27–30; Martin, 15, 119–122, 125.
- ²² Minutes, Hephzibah Baptist Church, Clarke County, Mississippi, August 13, 1853. This church again reported discipline of members for alcohol abuse on October 9, 1853; March 24, 1855; October 27, 1855; February 23, 1856; T. M. Bond, *A Republication of the Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association* (New Orleans: Hinton & Co., 1849), 250.
- ²³ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1853, 26; “The Unintended Consequences of Prohibition: Introduction,” Washington State University, accessed April 17, 2022 at <http://digitalexhibits.wsulibs.wsu.edu/exhibits/show/prohibition-in-the-u-s/introduction>. Mississippi Code, Chapter 342. “An Act for the Benefit of Mississippi College,” February 16, 1854; Minutes, Ebenezer Church, Amite County, Mississippi, August 18, 1855; Minutes, Bethesda Baptist Church, Hinds County, Mississippi, January 21, 1860.
- ²⁴ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1842, 2.
- ²⁵ Ibid, 1842, 2; 1861, 25–26.
- ²⁶ *Revised Code of Mississippi for 1857*, 154, article 84.
- ²⁷ Annual, Southern Baptist Convention, 1859, 60; Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (New York, 1949), 27, 30–31.
- ²⁸ Minutes, Hopewell Baptist Church, Lafayette County, Mississippi, September 1857; Clara Sue Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818–1918* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 110, 159–160, 167; Ralph D. Cross, ed., *Atlas of Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1974), 38; Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), p. 57; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1853, 9.
- ²⁹ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 447; Barnes, 103; Fletcher, 62; Minutes, Hephzibah Baptist Church, Clarke County, Mississippi, January 1845.
- ³⁰ McBeth, 449; Fletcher, 60–63.
- ³¹ McBeth, 449; Fletcher, 60–63, 65.
- ³² Minutes, First Baptist Church, Louisville, Winston County, Mississippi, June 1850, September 1850; Hopewell November 1849; Fletcher, 62–63; Sparks, 103; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1850, 7–8; 1852, 9; T. C. Schilling, *Abstract History of the Mississippi Baptist Association, From Its Preliminary Organization in 1806 to the Centennial Session in 1906*, 1907, 81.
- ³³ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1846, 16; 1855, 37; 1857, 8–10; Boyd, 108–109.
- ³⁴ Ibid, 1860, 17–19.
- ³⁵ Ibid, 1860, 1861, 8; Boyd, 108.

CHAPTER 6 NOTES

- ¹ Jesse L. Boyd, *A Popular History of the Baptists in Mississippi* (Jackson: The Baptist Press, 1930), 86–89.
- ² Minutes, Pearl River Baptist Association, 1860; U.S. Census, “Population of the United States in 1860: Mississippi,” accessed April 30, 2022, at census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1860/population/1860a-22.pdf.
- ³ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1848, 13.
- ⁴ Robert C. Rogers, “From Alienation to Integration: A Social History of Baptists in Antebellum Natchez, Mississippi” (Th.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990), 53–59.
- ⁵ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1859, 14–15; 1860, 37.

- ⁶ Glen Lee Greene, *House Upon a Rock: About Southern Baptists in Louisiana* (Alexandria, LA: Executive Board of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, 1973), 41–51, 81–84; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1852, 31; *The Baptist Record*, June 5, 1969.
- ⁷ Richard A. McLemore, “A History of Providence Church,” (Unpublished manuscript, Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission, Clinton, Mississippi, 1969); Minutes, Bethesda Baptist Church, Hinds County, Mississippi, February 21, 1846; March 31, 1846; September 16, 1860.
- ⁸ Minutes, Pearl River Baptist Association, 1860. The 1860 minutes listed 1,333 White members and 319 Black members, although six churches, representing another 223 members, did not report the racial mix of their congregation; Minutes, Sarepta Baptist Church, Franklin County, Mississippi, June 1856.
- ⁹ Minutes, Clear Creek Baptist Church, Adams County, Mississippi, September 14, 1858. Minutes, Bethesda Church, Hinds County, December 1848; September 1857; September 15, 1860. Minutes, Hephzibah Baptist Church, Clarke County, Mississippi, November 1850 December 1850. Minutes, Sarepta Church, Franklin County, November 1854, December 1854. Minutes, Hopewell Baptist Church, Lafayette County, Mississippi, December 1854.
- ¹⁰ T. C. Schilling, *Abstract History of the Mississippi Baptist Association for One Hundred Years from Its Preliminary Organization in 1806 to the Centennial Session in 1906* (New Orleans, 1908), 41; Minutes, Clear Creek Church, Adams County, April 13, 1850; Thomas C. Teasdale, *Reminiscences and Incidents of a Long Life*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: National Baptist Publishing Co., 1891), 179; Minutes, Sarepta Church, Franklin County, December 1857; Minutes, Clear Creek Church, Adams County, April 10, 1847.
- ¹¹ Minutes, Bethesda Baptist Church, Hinds County, November 19, 1859; January 21, 1860.
- ¹² J. L. Boyd, “A History of Batesville Baptist Church” (Unpublished manuscript, 1964. Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission); Minutes, Pearl River Baptist Association, 1860, 10–11.
- ¹³ McLemore, A History of Providence Church; Minutes, Sarepta Church, Franklin County, March 1854, September 1846, October 1846; Minutes, Bethesda Church, Hinds County, October 1853.
- ¹⁴ Minutes, Hephzibah Church, Clarke County, January 27, 1855; June 27, 1857. Minutes, Bethesda Church, Hinds County, October 1846; December 1852; January 1, 1853.
- ¹⁵ Minutes, Hopewell Baptist Church, Lafayette County, July 1857; Minutes, Bethesda Baptist Church, Hinds County, October 1851, April 1853, December 1854.
- ¹⁶ Minutes, Clear Creek Church, Adams County, April 10, 1847; July 26, 1847. Minutes, Sarepta Church, Franklin County, August 1846, June 1847, September 1847, December 1847. Minutes, Bethesda Church, Hinds County, December 1851; September 15, 1860. Unfermented grape juice was not invented until 1869.
- ¹⁷ Minutes, Sarepta Church, Franklin County, October 1, 1810; Minutes, Pearl River Baptist Association, 1860, 9; Minutes, Hephzibah Church, Clarke County, August 28, 1851; “The Choice: In Two Parts,” accessed April 25, 2022 at hymnary.org/hymnal/C2P41833?page=6; Minutes, Bethesda Church, Hinds County, June 15, 1855; *The Baptist Psalmody: A Selection of Hymns for the Worship of God*, review on Goodreads, accessed May 8, 2022, at [goodreads.com/book/show/50587023-the-baptist-psalmody](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/50587023-the-baptist-psalmody).
- ¹⁸ Minutes, Ebenezer Church, Amite County, November 14, 1846; October 16, 1847. Minutes, Hephzibah Church, Clarke County, June 1847.
- ¹⁹ Minutes, Bethesda Church, Hinds County, July 1853; June 20, 1857; July 20–26, 1857. Minutes, Sarepta Church, Franklin County, October 1855. Minutes, Hopewell Church, Lafayette County, May 1852, September 1858. Minutes, Ebenezer Church, Amite County, February 6–18, 1860.

Minutes, Hephzibah Church, Clarke County, June 5, 1858.

- ²⁰ John D. Hannah, "Layman's Prayer Revival of 1858," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134, no. 533 (January 1, 1977), 59–73; Teasdale, 173–181.
- ²¹ Minutes, Hephzibah Church, Clarke County, November 1847. The 1837 faith statement of the church originally stated in the fourth article, "We believe in the everlasting love of God to his people. In the [unclear handwritten word] unconditional election of a definite number of the human family to grace and glory." Key words were crossed out and new words written in so that the revision read as follows: "We believe in the everlasting love of God to his people. In the election of all of his spiritual children to grace and glory."
- ²² Charter of Woodville Baptist Meeting House, January 7, 1824; Minutes, Woodville Baptist Church, Wilkinson County, Mississippi, September 6, 1853. See chapter 2, footnote 7 for a detailed discussion of the debate over the construction date of the building.
- ²³ Richard J. Cawthon, *Lost Churches of Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 41–46; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1853 Annual, Southern Baptist Convention, 1861, 13; Teasdale, 181.
- ²⁴ McLemore, "A History of Providence Church." Archives, Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission, Clinton, Mississippi.
- ²⁵ Minutes, Bethesda Church, Hinds County, January 1849; May 1849; October 7, 1849; February 1855; October 1858; November 1858.
- ²⁶ Minutes, Hephzibah Church, Clarke County, July 18, 1846; Minutes, Sarepta Church, Franklin County, March 1855; Minutes, Hopewell Church, Lafayette County, May 1849; September 1850.
- ²⁷ T. M. Bond, *A Republication of the Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association* (New Orleans: Hinton & Co., 1849), 264.
- ²⁸ Minutes, Bethesda Church, Hinds County, December 17, 1859; Minutes, Sarepta Church, Franklin County, February 1852, June 1854, July 1854; Minutes, Hephzibah Church, Clarke County, May 1847; Minutes, Hopewell Church, Lafayette County, April 1854, May 1854, July 1854.
- ²⁹ Minutes, Sarepta Church, Franklin County, December 1846; Minutes, Bethesda Church, Hinds County, August 1850, May 1851; McLemore, "A History of Providence Church."
- ³⁰ Minutes, Ebenezer Church, Amite County, April 17, 1858; December 18, 1858. Minutes, Bethesda Church, Hinds County, July 1849; October 1849; March 19, 1859; April 16, 1859. Minutes, Hephzibah Church, Clarke County, March 14, 1846; April 18, 1846; November 12, 1853.
- ³¹ Bond, 248–249; Minutes, Hephzibah Church, Clarke County, August 28, 1851; Minutes, Pearl River Baptist Association, 1860.
- ³² Minutes, Bethesda Church, Hinds County, September 17, 1859; November 19, 1859.

CHAPTER 7 NOTES

- ¹ "The Secession Convention, 1861," in *Mississippi: A Documentary History*, Bradley G. Bond, ed. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 94–97.
- ² Glover Moore, "Separation from the Union 1854–1861," and John K. Bettersworth, "The Home Front, 1861–1865," in *A History of Mississippi*, vol. 1, William Aubrey McLemore, ed. (Hattiesburg: University & College Press of Mississippi, 1973), 443–445, 519.
- ³ William Wright Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention, 1845–1953* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1954), 44–48; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1861, 26–29.
- ⁴ John T. Christian, "A History of the Baptists of Mississippi," Unpublished manuscript, 1924, 186; Richard Aubrey McLemore and Nannie Pitts McLemore, *A History of Mississippi College* (Jack-

- son: Hederman Brothers, 1979), 75–76; Charles E. Martin, “Mississippi College With Pride: A History of Mississippi College, 1826–2004” (Clinton, MS: Mississippi College, 2007), 56; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1861, 13–16; Board of Trustees of Mississippi College Minute Book I, March 6, 1862, June 3, 1862.
- ⁵ Westley F. Busbee, Jr., *Mississippi: A History*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 136–138.
- ⁶ Jesse L. Boyd, *A Popular History of the Baptists in Mississippi* (Jackson: The Baptist Press, 1930), 111; Busbee, 141–142.
- ⁷ McLemore and McLemore, *A History of Mississippi College*, 77; Charles E. Martin, 121, 260; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1870, 24; Busbee, 143.
- ⁸ Minutes, Bethesda Church, August 15, 1863, September 19, 1863.
- ⁹ Busbee, 144–147; Minutes, Bethesda Church, Hinds County, September 1864.
- ¹⁰ Minutes, Sarepta Church, Franklin County, July 1864; Sparks, 132; *Minutes*, Pearl River Baptist Association, 1864, 3; Sally Jenkins and John Stauffer, *The State of Jones: The Small Southern County that Seceded from the Confederacy* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), 40–41, 52.
- ¹¹ Busbee, 150; McLemore and McLemore, *The History of Mississippi College*, 76.
- ¹² John K. Bettersworth, “The Home Front, 1861–1865,” in *A History of Mississippi*, Vol. 1, ed. by Richard Aubrey McLemore (Hattiesburg: University & College Press of Mississippi, 1973), 532–533; Minutes, Sarepta Baptist Church, Franklin County, Mississippi, July 1862; Minutes, Bethesda Baptist Church, Hinds County, Mississippi, October 18, 1862. In 1864, the legislature considered a bill withdrawing ministerial exemption from the military, but when Rev. John W. Harmon gave the invocation on the day of the vote and prayed that the Almighty would keep them from “putting carnal weapons” in the hands of clergy that would make them “ministers of wrath and vengeance,” the legislature abandoned the proposal.
- ¹³ Matthew A. Dunn to Virginia Dunn, October 13, 1863. Matthew A. Dunn and Family Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi; Minutes, Sarepta Baptist Church, Franklin County, Mississippi, October 1865.
- ¹⁴ Christian, 135, 197; Robbie Neal Sumrall, *A Light on a Hill: A History of Blue Mountain College* (Nashville: Benson Publishing Company, 1947), 6–12.
- ¹⁵ Thomas C. Teasdale, *Reminiscences and Incidents of a Long Life*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: National Baptist Publishing Co., 1891), 184–185.
- ¹⁶ Randy J. Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi), 135.
- ¹⁷ Minutes, Sarepta Baptist Church, Franklin County, 1864–1865; Sparks, 131; Minutes, Hopewell Baptist Church, Lafayette County, August 1862; Minutes, Bethesda Baptist Church, Hinds County, November 14, 1863.
- ¹⁸ Busbee, 149; Minutes, Sarepta Baptist Church, Franklin County, April 1863, January 1864.
- ¹⁹ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1866, 3, 12–17; 1867, 29–31.
- ²⁰ Boyd, 131.
- ²¹ Teasdale, 173–174, 187–203; Boyd, 130–132; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1866, 3, 14–16.
- ²² Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1867, 19; Minutes, Columbus Baptist Association, 1866, 6; Minutes, Choctaw Baptist Association, 1867, 8; Minutes, Coldwater Baptist Association, 1865, 15.
- ²³ Busbee, 146–150.
- ²⁴ Minutes, Coldwater Baptist Association, 1865, 15; Minutes, Pearl River Baptist Association,

1866, 5.

- ²⁵ Charles E. Martin, *A Heritage to Cherish: A History of First Baptist Church, Clinton, Mississippi, 1852–2002* (Nashville: Fields Publishing, Inc., 2001), 36; Sparks, 139.
- ²⁶ Minutes, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Amite County. November 1, 1873; May 2, 1874; October 3, 1874; July 1, 1877. Minutes, Sarepta Baptist Church, Franklin County, September 1865.
- ²⁷ Sparks, 139–140; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Association, 1874.
- ²⁸ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1866, 22–23; 1867, 20; 1868, 7; 1874, 26–27.
- ²⁹ Patrick H. Thompson, *The History of Negro Baptists in Mississippi* (Jackson: R. W. Bailey Printing Co., 1898), 51; Sparks, 144–145.
- ³⁰ Sparks, 141–142, 145.
- ³¹ Ibid, 142–144.
- ³² Christian, 193; Boyd, 130–132.
- ³³ Robbie Neal Sumrall, *A Light on a Hill: A History of Blue Mountain College* (Benson Publishing Co., 1947), 16–30; “Blue Mountain College” in Mississippi Encyclopedia, accessed June 22, 2022, at mississippiencyclopedia.org/entries/blue-mountain-college/.
- ³⁴ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1867, 29–31; 1868, 34–37; 1869, 23–30.
- ³⁵ Ibid, 1869, 23–30; 1870, 28–34; 1875, 21.
- ³⁶ Ibid, 1866, 7–10; 1867, 17–18; 1868, 16; 1869, 8–11.
- ³⁷ Ibid, 1869, 8–11; 1870, 39; 1872, 34; 1873, 8–9.
- ³⁸ Ibid, 1867, 19; 1868, 3–4, 12; 1869, 32–33; 1870, 24, 40; Christian, 197.
- ³⁹ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1873, 31; 1874, 3.
- ⁴⁰ Christian, 203.
- ⁴¹ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1866, 31; 1875, 15; Minutes, General Association of Baptists in South Mississippi and East Louisiana, 1874, 9; Glenn Lee Greene, *House Upon a Rock: About Southern Baptists in Louisiana* (Alexandria, LA: Executive Board of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, 1973, 150, 153.
- ⁴² Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1868, 22–23, 29–30; 1869, 47; 1870, 9–11; Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 80.
- ⁴³ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1868, 22–23, 29–30; 1873, 17–18; 1875, 12; 1876, 24–25.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid, 1867, 7; Boyd, 121–122.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid, 1876, 20–21. The gavel presented to the 1876 convention is kept at the convention building as of 2023, but it is only used on special occasions due to its fragile condition. Although Hackett did not name his source of information, his speech closely followed the account of John Griffing Jones in *A Concise History of the Introduction of Protestantism into Mississippi and the Southwest*, published in 1866. Jones, a descendant of Richard Curtis, was a Methodist minister who used primary sources and firsthand accounts to record the history of the first Baptists and other Protestants in Mississippi. Chapter one of this book quotes extensively from Jones’s book.

CHAPTER 8 NOTES

- ¹ William B. Hesseltine, *The South in American History* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1943), 537. “Jim Crow” was a term for laws that separated White people from Black people and discriminated against Black people. The Supreme Court upheld the legality of these laws in 1892 in the case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, ruling that Black people could be segregated from White people on railroads.

- This enshrined the principle that “separate but equal” public facilities were legal in America. See Thomas S. Kidd, *American History*, vol. 2 (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2019), 45.
- ² Westley F. Busbee, Jr., *Mississippi: A History*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2015), 164–167; Robert Lowry and William H. McCardle, *A History of Mississippi from the Discovery of the Great River by Hernando DeSoto Including the Earliest Settlement Made by the French Under Iberville to the Death of Jefferson Davis* (Jackson: R. H. Henry & Co., 1891), 387; Bradley G. Bond, *Mississippi: A Documentary History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi), 2003, 177–179.
- ³ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1890, 31; 1891, 14; 1897, 20–21.
- ⁴ Jesse L. Boyd, *A Popular History of the Baptists in Mississippi* (Jackson: The Baptist Press, 1930), 138. *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi* (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1891), vol. 2, 383; Randy J. Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi for the Mississippi Historical Society), 2001, 151, 154.
- ⁵ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1879, 25–29; Boyd, 154–155.
- ⁶ Hasseltine, 544.
- ⁷ William H. Hardy and Toney A. Hardy, *No Compromise with Principle: Autobiography and Biography of William Harris Hardy in Dialogue* (New York: American Book–Stratford Press, 1946), 313; Benjamin Morris, *Hattiesburg, Mississippi: A History of the Hub City* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2014), 53–54, 62, 65, 77; Busbee, 193.
- ⁸ Boyd, 164. Patrick H. Thompson, *The History of Negro Baptists in Mississippi* (Jackson: The R. W. Bailey Printing Co., 1898), 116, 146; Busbee, 197; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1874, 17–18; 1877, 43–44.
- ⁹ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1873, 31; 1879, 26–27, 34; 1880, 38; 1881, 31; *The Baptist Record*, May 23, 1878; Leavell and Bailey, *History of Mississippi Baptists from the Earliest Times*, vol. I, 38–39.
- ¹⁰ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1875, 12, 13; 1879, 35; 1880, 28; 1881, 27; Glen Lee Greene, *House Upon a Rock: About Southern Baptists in Louisiana* (Alexandria, LA: Executive Board of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, 1973).
- ¹¹ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1881, 29–31; Leavell and Bailey, I, 40; Greene, 188.
- ¹² Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1881, 19, 29–31; 1882, 31–32; 1888, 54–56; 1955, 55; 1956, 44.
- ¹³ Charles E. Martin, *Mississippi College with Pride: A History of Mississippi College 1826–2004* (Clinton: Mississippi College, 2007), 119, 124–126.
- ¹⁴ Robert A. Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People, 1607–1972* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974), 270–272.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 272–273; Annual, Southern Baptist Convention, 1891, 22–23; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1891, 16, 18–19.
- ¹⁶ Clara Sue Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818–1918* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 178–179; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1891, 59; 1892, 46; 1893, 58; 1894, 39; 1896, 47.
- ¹⁷ Boyd, 279.
- ¹⁸ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1875, 5, 31; 1878, 50; 1894, 8; 1885, 26; Annual, Southern Baptist Convention, 1878, 32; *The Baptist Record*, May 23, 1878; Boyd, 280.
- ¹⁹ “Baptist Young People’s Union of America,” *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 134–135; Annual, Southern Baptist Convention, 1895, 82; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1896, 27, 1899, 35–36; Boyd, 286.

- ²⁰ Sean Milner, "First Person: The Baptist Children's Village Next 125 Years," *The Baptist Record*, July 13, 2022, accessed July 17, 2022 at thebaptistrecord.org/first-person-the-baptist-childrens-village-next-125-years/; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1897, 11, 1898, 26–27; Paul N. Nunnery, *I Heard the Children Singing: A Centennial Record of The Baptist Children's Village* (The Baptist Children's Village: Second Edition, 2000), 77–78. *The Baptist Children's Village Yearbook* first showed photographs of Black children in 1984.
- ²¹ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1899, 29–30.
- ²² Ibid, 1869, 32; 1876, 40; M. P. Lowrey, "Mississippi Department," *The Tennessee Baptist*, July 22, 1876.
- ²³ J. B. Gambrell, "The Paper Question in Mississippi," *The Tennessee Baptist*, September 9, 1876; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1877, 44; 1880, 38; 1881; 50; *The Baptist Record*, July 18, 1897; "Gambrell, James Bruton," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 523–524.
- ²⁴ Z. T. Leavell, *Baptist Annals or Twenty-Two Years with Mississippi Baptists, 1877–1899* (Philadelphia, 1899), 27; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1895, 23; 1898, 9, 13, 23; Leavell and Bailey, vol. 2, 1399–1403.
- ²⁵ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1881, 43; 1882, 48–49.
- ²⁶ Ibid, 1885, 27–28.
- ²⁷ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1870, 49; 1877, 31.
- ²⁸ Ibid, 1883, 9–11.
- ²⁹ Ibid, 13–14, 27, 31.
- ³⁰ Ibid, 13, 38.
- ³¹ Ibid, 1885, 7–11, 20–21, 27; *The Baptist Record*, September 3, 1885.
- ³² Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1899, 45; 1886, 29; Leavell and Bailey, vol. 1, 60–61, 87–125.
- ³³ Richard Aubrey McLemore and Nannie Pitts McLemore, *The History of Mississippi College* (Jackson: Hederman Brothers, 1979), 95.
- ³⁴ McLemore, *The History of Mississippi College*, 111; Z. T. Leavell, *Baptist Annals or Twenty-Two Years with Mississippi Baptists, 187–1899*, 76, 78–79; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1891, 39.
- ³⁵ Leavell, 77–78; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1891, 38–39; U.S. Census of 1920, "Mississippi: Population of Incorporated Places: 1920, 1910 and 1900," 17–18.
- ³⁶ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1891, 31; McLemore, *The History of Mississippi College*, 118–119.
- ³⁷ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1892, 11–12, 15–16; Boyd, 191; Leavell, *Baptist Annals*, 82–83; McLemore, *The History of Mississippi College*, 120; Charles E. Martin, *Mississippi College with Pride: A History of Mississippi College 1826–2004* (Clinton: Mississippi College, 2007), 169.
- ³⁸ Boyd, 171; McLemore, *The History of Mississippi College*, 123; Martin, 169.
- ³⁹ Leavell, *Baptist Annals*, 85–92; Minutes, Mississippi College Board of Trustees, January 20, 1893; *The Baptist Record*, February 2, 1893; March 2, 1893; Boyd, 249–251; Martin, 170.
- ⁴⁰ L. M. Stone, "The July Convention and the College," *The Baptist Record*, June 19, 1893; Boyd, 172–173; Martin, 170–175.
- ⁴¹ Boyd, 178–179.
- ⁴² Boyd, 196–197; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Association, 1893; 7; Z. T. Leavell and T. J. Bailey, *A Complete History of Mississippi Baptists from the Earliest Times*, vol. 1 (Jackson: Mississippi

- Baptist Publishing Company, 1904), 68–69; *The Baptist Record*, May 6, 1897.
- ⁴³ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Association, 1895; 1896, 9.
- ⁴⁴ Boyd, 179–180; *The Baptist Record*, March 18, 1897; May 6, 1897; June 24, 1897;
- ⁴⁵ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Association, 1897, 6, 14; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1897, 13, 17, 18, 22, 31; 1905, 47–48; Leavell and Bailey, vol. 1, 70; Boyd, 198. Martin died of a heart attack while riding a train in Louisiana in 1898, and he was buried in Gloster.
- ⁴⁶ Earnest Earl Kelly, “A History of the Mississippi Baptist Convention from Its Conception to 1900.” (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 1953), 114; *The Baptist Record*, May 6, 1897.
- ⁴⁷ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1888, 54–56.
- ⁴⁸ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 457–458; Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 106; A. H. Newman, “The Whitsitt Controversy,” in George Augustus Lofton, *A Review of the Question* (Nashville, 1897), 148–213; Henry C. Vedder, “Dr. Whitsitt’s New Book,” in Lofton, *A Review of the Question*, 142.
- ⁴⁹ Fletcher, 106; *Western Recorder*, April 23, 1896; *The Baptist Record*, July 1, 1897; “Christian, John Tyler,” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 257–258.
- ⁵⁰ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1897, 8, 10.
- ⁵¹ Fletcher, 106; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1898, 14.
- ⁵² Richard Aubrey McLemore, *A History of Mississippi Baptists* (Jackson: Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, 1971), 242.
- ⁵³ *The Baptist Record*, November 12, 1896.

CHAPTER 9 NOTES

- ¹ Thomas S. Kidd, *American History*, vol. 2 (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2019), 73.
- ² Robert A. Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People, 1607–1972* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974), 317.
- ³ Glenn M. Linden, et. al., *Legacy of Freedom: A History of the United States* (River Forest, Illinois: Laidlaw Brothers, 1986), 537; Kidd, 74.
- ⁴ Linden, 157–158; Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 138.
- ⁵ Kidd, 117–131; Linden, 159.
- ⁶ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1897, 47.
- ⁷ *Ibid*, 1900, 16; 1901, 56–57; 1902, 49–52.
- ⁸ Annual, Southern Baptist Convention, 1900, 164, 172; 1930, 427, 448; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1901, 61–63. These totals only reflect Southern Baptist membership in Mississippi, which is the focus of this book. Growth was also rapid among Black Baptist denominations.
- ⁹ “Gambrell, James Bruton,” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 523–524; “Mullins, Edgar Young,” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 2, 950; Fletcher, 107–108, 142–143.
- ¹⁰ “Gray, Baron DeKalb,” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 1, 585; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1904, 26, 1908, 45; 1929, 25; Fletcher, 148–150.
- ¹¹ “Flake, Arthur,” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 1, 440–441; Fletcher, 123.
- ¹² *The Baptist Record*, May 28, 1970, 2; “Leavell, Landrum Pinson,” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 2, 782–783.

- ¹³ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1900, 28; 1901, 4, 10; 1911, 60–61.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, 1900, 20–21; 1903, 35–36; 1908, 45–47; 1910, 59; 1923, 90–91; 1929, 81–82.
- ¹⁵ Ibid, 1903, 44; 1909, 48–49; 1911, 58; 1912, 22; “Mississippi Baptists Mourn Passing of Miss Margaret Lackey,” *The Baptist Record*, June 10, 1948; “Margaret Lackey: 1858–1948,” *The Baptist Record*, September 13, 1979; Almarine Brown, *Hearts the Lord Opened: The History of Mississippi Woman’s Missionary Union* (Jackson: Woman’s Missionary Union of Mississippi, 1954), 32–36.
- ¹⁶ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1911, 40, 91–92.
- ¹⁷ L. Lavon Gray, *Sharing the Song of Jesus: A Celebration of 60 Years of the Church Music Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention* (Jackson: Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, 2005), 3–4.
- ¹⁸ Ibid, 1901, 22–23; 1903, 40–41, 1904, 42; “Mississippi Baptist Orphanage” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 895.
- ¹⁹ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1909, 72; 1911, 57.
- ²⁰ Ibid, 1907, 30–31; 1908, 1, 60; 1910, 63; 1911, 81–82; 1912, 28–29.
- ²¹ Ibid, 1912, 85–86; “Lipsey, Plautus Iberus,” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 2, 788.
- ²² Jesse L. Boyd, *A Popular History of Baptists in Mississippi* (Jackson: The Baptist Press, 1930), 220; “Lawrence, John Benjamin” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 3, 1800–1801; Glen Lee Greene, *House Upon a Rock: About Southern Baptists in Louisiana* (Alexandria, LA: Executive Board of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, 1973), 216; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1914, 37; 1916, 81–84; 1917, 2–3; 1918, 40–41.
- ²³ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1916, 81–84, 1919, 40–42; Boyd, 229.
- ²⁴ Ibid, 1919, 41–42; 1920, 62; “Baptist Record,” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 1, 122–123.
- ²⁵ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1917, 90; “Margaret Lackey: 1858–1948,” *The Baptist Record*, September 13, 1979.
- ²⁶ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1916; 28–29.
- ²⁷ Ibid, 1919, 43–45; Kidd, 111–113.
- ²⁸ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1920, 40; *The Clarion-Ledger*, December 2, 1919.
- ²⁹ Walter F. Busbee, Jr., *Mississippi: A History*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 221.
- ³⁰ Fletcher, 134; “Mississippi Baptist Convention” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 889; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1920, 31–32; 1925, 91; “Temple Turns 100,” *Hattiesburg American*, November 10, 2007; Temple Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, Church Conference Agenda, April 14, 2024, reported 6,998 members as of March 31, 2024.
- ³¹ Fletcher, 148–150; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1929, 24–25.
- ³² Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1921, 34; Boyd, 222; “Gunter, Richmond Baker,” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), 1746. Chapter 10 describes Gunter’s sacrifices during the Great Depression, including reduction of his own salary and the sale of his home to pay convention debts.
- ³³ Fletcher, 144, Baker, 402–404.
- ³⁴ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1925, 30, 91; 1926, 72; 1927, 29.
- ³⁵ Ibid, 1927, 90–93.
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- ³³ *The Baptist Record*, October 29, 1936; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1936, 4, 40. The minutes of the 1936 Mississippi Baptist Convention, on pages 36–47, include memories of the first state convention president, Ashley Vaughn; the church that Vaughn served as pastor where the state convention was organized, Clear Creek Baptist; and the first Mississippi Baptist Church, Salem Baptist. Copies of the minutes are available in the archives of the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission. Also, the October 29, 1936, issue of *The Baptist Record* has 28 pages of stories of Mississippi Baptist history. This issue and other issues of *The Baptist Record* can be accessed by visiting archive.org/details/mississippibaptisthistoricalcommission and searching for the year and date.
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- ³⁶ Almarine Brown, *Hearts the Lord Opened: The History of Mississippi Woman’s Missionary Union* (Jackson: Woman’s Missionary Union of Mississippi, 1954), 91; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1938, 65; 1939, 79; 1940, 80, 102–104.
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- ⁵⁸ McCall Controversy Papers: *Southern Baptist News*, November 11, 1949, 8; Audio Interview Regarding the McCall Controversy; *The Baptist Record*, February 16, 1950, 1.
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- ⁴ Busbee, 320; John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 62, 140–141, 164–166, 283.
- ⁵ Dennis J. Mitchell, *A New History of Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 470; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1969, 89–90.
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CHAPTER 12 NOTES

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- ³³ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1984, 40–41; 1987, 36–37.
- ³⁴ Ibid, 1976, 36; 1982, 57; *The Baptist Record*, August 1, 1974, 1, 2; September 4, 1975, 1; May 20, 1976, 1; December 9, 1976, 1, 3; October 5, 1978, 1; October 9, 1980, 1.
- ³⁵ Fletcher, 251; *The Baptist Record*, December 1, 1983, 1.
- ³⁶ *The Baptist Record*, November 17, 1977, 1; March 8, 1979, 1, 6; Sparks, 265.
- ³⁷ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1984, 32; *The Baptist Record*, February 9, 1984, 3; Sparks, 266.
- ³⁸ *The Baptist Record*, June 8, 1978, 1; April 21, 1988, 3, 5; “Mississippi Baptist Seminary: History,” accessed June 8, 2024, at msbsbc.org/history.
- ³⁹ Ibid, November 7, 1985, 17–19.

- ⁴⁰ Ibid, October 2, 1980, 1; October 8, 1981, 1.
- ⁴¹ Ibid, January 22, 1981, 1; July 9, 1981, 1; May 6, 1982, 2; March 17, 1983, 1, March 31, 1983, May 26, 1983, 1.
- ⁴² Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1981, 199; 1990, 210; *The Baptist Record*, December 8, 1988, 3.
- ⁴³ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1973, 165; 1975, 156; 1976, 127; 1989, 79; *The Baptist Record*, August 16, 1990, 7.
- ⁴⁴ *The Baptist Record*, April 17, 1975, 1; May 29, 1975, 1, 2; December 18, 1975, 1; March 11, 1976, 1; December 15, 1977, 1.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid, September 14, 1978, 1; November 18, 1982, 1; Martin, 215, 221.
- ⁴⁶ Evelyn Williams, telephone interview by author, September 4, 2022; Randle Varnado, son-in-law of Charles Melton, telephone interview by author, March 27, 2023; *The Baptist Record*, February 22, 1962, 8; July 20, 1995, 9.
- ⁴⁷ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1980, 36–39; *The Baptist Record*, April 21, 1977; December 14, 1977, 1; January 18, 1979, 1; March 20, 1980, 1; October 16, 1980; November 15, 1979, 1; November 22, 1979, 1; November 6, 1980, 1; November 20, 1980, 1, 3.
- ⁴⁸ *The Baptist Record*, July 1, 1982, 1; December 5, 1985, 3; November 13, 1986, 3; June 18, 1987, 3; August 27, 1987, 3; December 10, 1987, 4 September 1, 1988, 1; November 17, 1988, 3; November 24, 1988, 3, 4; December 15, 1988, 3; November 2, 1989, 3; November 23, 1989, 3; January 4, 1990, 5.
- ⁴⁹ Donna Duck Wheeler, *William Carey College: The First 100 Years* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), 72, 76; *The Baptist Record*, May 6, 1976, 1; February 14, 1985, 3.
- ⁵⁰ *The Baptist Record*, May 12, 1988, 3, 9; October 6, 1988, 3, 5; November 3, 1988, 4.
- ⁵¹ Ibid, November 3, 1988, 3, 4, 5; November 10, 1988, 3; May 18, 1989, 4; June 1, 1989, 3; June 15, 1989, 3.
- ⁵² Ibid, June 29, 1989; July 20, 1989; November 7, 1989.
- ⁵³ The 1973 annual meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Convention listed the congregational songs at each session, all of which were traditional hymns, such as “All Hail the Power of Jesus Name,” “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus,” and the Bill Gaither Southern gospel song, “He Touched Me.” Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1973, 39–41; *The Baptist Record*, December 16, 1971, 3; December 27, 1971, 7; October 19, 1972, 7; December 14, 1972, 1, 2; L. Lavon Gray, *Sharing the Song of Jesus: A Celebration of 60 Years of the Church Music Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention* (Jackson: Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, 2005), 102, 114, 121.
- ⁵⁴ *The Baptist Record*, March 6, 1975, 1; August 22, 1985, 11; August 29, 1985, 8; September 5, 1985, 6; September 12, 1985, 9; September 19, 1985, 9; October 31, 1985, 6; November 14, 1985, 5.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid, January 27, 1972, 1, 5; November 6, 1975, 9, 11; January 1, 1976, 1, July 22, 1976, 1, 2; August 12, 1976, 4; May 5, 1977, 1.
- ⁵⁶ *The Baptist Record*, February 8, 1973, 1; February 22, 1973, 3; June 21, 1973, 1, 4; June 19, 1980, 1, 3; November 26, 1981, 1, 2; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1985, 41.
- ⁵⁷ *The Baptist Record*, February 8, 1973, 2; September 13, 1973, 1, 2; August 5, 1976, 1, 2; Minutes, Woodville Heights Baptist Church, Jackson, Mississippi, March 15, 1978.
- ⁵⁸ *The Baptist Record*, August 13, 1981, 1; July 21, 1983, 3; September 15, 1983, 1; August 2, 1984, 6; October 11, 1984, 5; “Internal Revenue Service: Impact on Private Schools and Impact of *Bob Jones University v. U.S.*,” accessed June 1, 2024, at irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/eotopicb84.pdf. The court decision in *Bob Jones* affected Clarksdale Baptist Church and denied tax-exempt status to Missis-

issippi private schools that could not demonstrate a nondiscriminatory policy.

- ⁵⁹ Bennie Crockett, email to Bob Rogers, December 12, 2022; Joe McKeever, email to Bob Rogers, May 8, 2023; *The Baptist Record*, February 13, 1986, 6. Pastor Joe McKeever used persuasion to get the Columbus congregation to accept a Black member. McKeever enlisted a senior adult woman involved in WMU to stand beside Chogo, and he reminded the congregation that Chogo had been led to Christ by their Southern Baptist missionaries. Four people voted against her membership, but one of those four decided to pay Kezia's college tuition the next semester.
- ⁶⁰ *The Baptist Record*, November 25, 1976, 1; February 24, 1983, 1, 4; April 28, 1983, 2; June 9, 1983, 1; McGregor, 185-186.
- ⁶¹ Jere Nash and Andy Taggart, *Mississippi Politics: The Struggle for Power, 1976-2008*, 2nd ed. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 212-213; *The Baptist Record*, June 1, 1978, 1, 2.
- ⁶² Nash and Taggart, 214-219.
- ⁶³ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1978, 60; *The Baptist Record*, November 13, 1969, 1; April 19, 1979, 1; April 26, 1979, 1; May 10, 1979, 1; May 17, 1979, 1.
- ⁶⁴ *The Baptist Record*, April 26, 1979, 1; November 8, 1979, 1; April 21, 1983, 1; September 5, 1985, 3; September 12, 1985, 3; March 12, 1987, 3, 4.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid, April 14, 1977, 1, 2; January 24, 1980, 1; February 21, 1980, 1.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid, January 24, 1980, 1; February 21, 1980, 1; June 8, 1989, 3, 4; July 27, 1989, 3.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid, August 27, 1981, 1, 2.
- ⁶⁸ Fletcher, 272; Harry Leon McBeth, *Texas Baptists: A Sesquicentennial History* (Dallas: BaptistWay Press, 1998), 323, 356-357; James C. Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Garland, TX: Hannibal Books, 2005), 28-38; *The Baptist Record*, June 21, 1979, 1; January 17, 1980, 1.
- ⁶⁹ Fletcher, 255, 270, 280.
- ⁷⁰ *The Baptist Record*, September 13, 1984, 4; Fletcher, 261, 283, 290.
- ⁷¹ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1984, 49-50; *The Baptist Record*, November 29, 1979, 1, 2; November 19, 1987, 3; November 30, 1989, 5.
- ⁷² Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1984, 37; Fletcher, 252-253; *The Baptist Record*, November 21, 1985, 3, 15.
- ⁷³ *The Baptist Record*, November 19, 1987, 3; June 22, 1989, 5; August 3, 1989, 3, 4, 5.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid, January 3, 1980, 1; March 6, 1980, 1; January 29, 1987, 3; April 14, 1988, 5; August 25, 1988, 3, 4.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid, June 21, 1979, 4; October 9, 1980, 1; October 8, 1987, 2; February 18, 1988, 2; May 26, 1988, 6.
- ⁷⁶ Earl Kelly, "Ordination of Women," unpublished paper, and "Fundamentalism as I See It," Kelly Papers, Archives, Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission.
- ⁷⁷ McGregor, 69, 127-128, 131; *The Baptist Record*, May 9, 1985, 2, 7.
- ⁷⁸ *The Baptist Record*, January 23, 1986, 4; May 14, 1987, 3.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid, October 17, 1985, 2, 5; April 18, 1985, 3, 4.
- ⁸⁰ *The Baptist Record*, June 27, 1985, 2; July 18, 1985, 3; Fletcher, 284-285; Hefley, 57.

CHAPTER 13 NOTES

- ¹ Westley F. Busbee, Jr., *Mississippi: A History*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 442-443; Thomas S. Kidd, *American History*, vol. 2 (Nashville: B & H Academic), 2019, 298, 302, 311-312; Busbee, 373, 375, 377-378; *The Baptist Record*, July 30, 1992, 7, 1992; January 20, 2000, 1.

- ² Busbee, 404, 406, 410, 442–443; Kidd, 324–325; Randy J. Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 277; *The Baptist Record*, September 1, 2005, 1; September 8, 2005, 1, 5; September 22, 2005, 1; October 13, 2005, 2; January 5, 2006, 3; November 22, 2007, 1; March 19, 2020; 1.
- ³ Kidd, 308; Busbee, 426, 453; *The Baptist Record*, February 7, 2002, 8; May 4, 2006, 2; November 17, 2011, 1, 2.
- ⁴ Kidd, 330, 334; *The Baptist Record*, November 4, 2004, 1; November 11, 2004, 1; November 5, 2009, 1; November 8, 2012, 1, 10; November 4, 2015, 1, 9; May 29, 2018, 1; November 22, 2018, 12.
- ⁵ Roger C. Richards, *History of Southern Baptists* (Graceville, FL: Roger C. Richards, 2015), 345–346; *The Baptist Record*, June 21, 1990, 3; February 18, 2010, 12. The North American Mission Board (NAMB) was created out of a merger of the Home Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission, and Radio and TV Commission. The SBC withdrew from the interdenominational Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (BJCPA), a religious liberty lobby. The SBC merged the work of the BJCPA with the former Christian Life Commission into the newly created Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC).
- ⁶ *The Baptist Record*, June 18, 1992, 3.
- ⁷ *The Baptist Record*, June 3, 1993, 3, 9; June 17, 1993, 3; May 15, 2003, 3; September 24, 2009, 1; February 18, 2010, 12.
- ⁸ *Ibid*, April 25, 1996, 3; April 27, 2000, 4; March 14, 2002, 1; March 28, 2013, 3; May 29, 2014, 1; December 7, 2017, 1.
- ⁹ Jack Winton Gunn, *Mississippi Baptist Convention Ministers: Current Biographies*, (Clinton, MS: Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission, 1986), 52–53; *The Baptist Record*, April 27, 1989, 3. Parkway Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), later relocated west to Clinton in Hinds County.
- ¹⁰ *The Baptist Record*, February 1, 1990, 3; April 4, 1996, 3.
- ¹¹ *Ibid*, April 23, 1998, 3; June 11, 1998, 4.
- ¹² *Ibid*, July 26, 1990, 3, 7.
- ¹³ *Ibid*, August 30, 1990, 3, 4, 5; September 6, 1990, 2, 3; September 20, 1990, 3. In announcing his retirement, McGregor said he had planned to retire earlier, but Bill Causey asked him to wait a year.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, February 28, 1991, 2; “Southern Baptists: Moderates Form Alternative Fellowship,” *Christianity Today*, June 24, 1991; *The Baptist Record*, May 16, 1991, 3; May 23, 1991, 4.
- ¹⁵ *The Baptist Record*, December 12, 1991, 3, 10; May 12, 1992, 3; June 4, 1992, 5; November 19, 1992, 4; December 10, 1992, 4.
- ¹⁶ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1991, 25–26, 32; *The Baptist Record*, November 21, 1991, 3.
- ¹⁷ *The Baptist Record*, August 29, 1991, 3; August 4, 1994, 3; August 3, 1995, 3, 5; May 16, 1996, 3; August 1, 1996, 3.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, December 8, 1994, 2; November 20, 1997, 6; Richards, 357–358.
- ¹⁹ *The Baptist Record*, January 22, 1998, 2; March 12, 1998, 4; March 19, 1998, 2.
- ²⁰ *Ibid*, June 20, 1996, 3; March 13, 1997, 3. “Martin to helm The Baptist Record, Young promoted to associate editor,” *The Baptist Record*, October 18, 2023, accessed June 2, 2024, at thebaptistrecord.org/martin-to-helm-the-baptist-record-young-promoted-to-associate-editor/.
- ²¹ *Ibid*, December 13, 1990, 3.
- ²² “Bitter fruit multiplies for MC’s McMillan,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, January 14, 1993, 21; “The Statement of John Williams,” *The Sun Herald* (Biloxi), January 15, 1993, 29; *The Baptist Record*, Jan-

uary 28, 1993, 3.

- ²³ Charles E. Martin, *Mississippi College With Pride: A History of Mississippi College 1826–2004* (Clinton, MS: Mississippi College, 2007), 221; *The Baptist Record*, August 12, 1993, 3; September 29, 1994, 3; “FBI questions Nobles’ escorts, purchase of stocks: Ex-Mississippi College chief is accused of taking school funds,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, May 15, 1994, 1; “Fall of College President Stuns Students, Staff,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1995, accessed June 15, 2024 at latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-02-21-mn-34481-story.html. The article in the *Los Angeles Times* misspelled Wilbanks’s name as “Willibanks.”
- ²⁴ *The Baptist Record*, November 3, 1994, 3; February 2, 1995, 3; “Hospitalized Nobles has stroke,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, February 17, 1995, 11, 13; *The Baptist Record*, March 9, 1995, 3; November 9, 1995, 4; January 25, 1996, 3; May 9, 1996, 3; Martin, 221.
- ²⁵ *The Baptist Record*, March 17, 1994, 3; September 29, 1994, 3, 4; “Diversity goal in shaping MC trustee board,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, September 23, 1994, 15.
- ²⁶ *The Baptist Record*, September 29, 1994, 3, 4.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, October 6, 1994, 5; October 20, 1994, 3.
- ²⁸ *Ibid*, October 20, 1994, 3.
- ²⁹ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1994, 26–27, 29–31; *The Baptist Record*, November 10, 1994, 3, 4.
- ³⁰ *The Baptist Record*, October 20, 1994, 2, 3.
- ³¹ *Ibid*, October 6, 1994, 5; October 17, 1996, 3.
- ³² Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1996, 25–26; *The Baptist Record*, October 17, 1996, 3; November 7, 1996, 3.
- ³³ *The Baptist Record*, November 19, 1998, 3; “Mississippi College faces budget woes,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, February 29, 2000, 1; *The Baptist Record*, March 9, 2000, 4; Martin, 222–229. A multimillion-dollar accounting mistake by the budget office was made public in 2000, causing a 9% budget cut and a freeze on salaries. It also raised fears of another financial scandal like the one that occurred under Nobles. However, President Todd weathered the storm, reassuring that no money was missing and that there was no evidence of wrongdoing.
- ³⁴ *The Baptist Record*, July 20, 1989, 3, 4–5; November 9, 1989, 3; July 1, 1993, 3; March 16, 1995, 6; December 12, 1996, 9; March 20, 1997, 3.
- ³⁵ *Ibid*, August 12, 1993, 3; February 29, 1996, 3; April 3, 1997, 3; October 9, 1997, 3; October 16, 1997, 6; June 25, 1998, 3.
- ³⁶ *Ibid*, August 8, 1991, 3; March 12, 1992, 8; March 26, 1992, 3; *Newton Record*, February 27, 1992.
- ³⁷ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1992, 25; *The Baptist Record*, November 19, 1992, 3; August 22, 1996, 3; October 10, 1996, 7; April 3, 1997, 3. For a discussion about the reasons Clarke College ultimately closed its doors, see the articles by Ron Kirkland and W. Lowery Comper in *The Baptist Record*, July 30, 1992, 2, 10; August 13, 1992, 2, 10.
- ³⁸ *The Baptist Record*, August 16, 1990, 7; March 9, 2000, 4; *Book of Reports*, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2000, 56; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2000, 34.
- ³⁹ *The Baptist Record*, August 26, 1999, 1.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*, November 12, 1992, 5; November 16, 1995, 3; November 15, 2007, 9.
- ⁴¹ Jere Nash and Andy Taggart, *Mississippi Politics: The Struggle for Power, 1976–2008*, 2nd ed. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 214–219.
- ⁴² *The Baptist Record*, June 30, 1994, 3; December 13, 2007, 1; January 22, 2009, 1.
- ⁴³ *The Baptist Record*, December 19, 1996, 1.

- ⁴⁴ Ibid, January 7, 1993, 5; *The Sun Herald*, August 14, 1993, 13; *The Baptist Record*, September 17, 1998, 4.
- ⁴⁵ *The Baptist Record*, February 11, 1993, 4.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid, January 5, 1995, 3; April 27, 1995, 2, 3; June 1, 1995, 2; June 8, 1995, 7; June 22, 1995, 7; September 28, 1995, 3; June 13, 1996, 3.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid, December 16, 1993, 3; June 29, 1995, 1.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid, March 27, 1997, 3; April 24, 1997, 3.
- ⁴⁹ L. Lavon Gray, *Sharing the Songs of Jesus: A Celebration of 60 Years of the Church Music Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention* (Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, 2005), 176–177, 180–181; *The Baptist Record*, March 21, 1991, 4.
- ⁵⁰ Gray, 190, 199; Leslie Myers Gillis, “Contemporary Practices in Southern Baptist Church Music: A Collective Case Study of Worship, Ministry Design, and Music Education,” Dissertation, Boston University, 2013, accessed July 29, 2023, at eric.ed.gov/?id=ED557026.
- ⁵¹ *The Baptist Record*, August 12, 1993, 10; Gray, 193.
- ⁵² *The Baptist Record*, April 23, 1998, 3; May 7, 1998, 3.
- ⁵³ Ibid, August 6, 1998, 3; “James Robert Futral,” accessed July 16, 2023, at praybook.com/web/james_robert.futral/245966. Broadmoor Baptist Church, Jackson (Hinds), relocated north to Madison in Madison County.
- ⁵⁴ *The Baptist Record*, October 22, 1998, 7; June 28, 2001, 1; May 20, 2004, 1; Kidd, 298.
- ⁵⁵ *The Baptist Record*, August 26, 1999, 1; June 27, 2002, 1.
- ⁵⁶ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2000, 29; 2001, 28; 2002, 27; Bob Pittman, *Chosen: The Mission & Message of Frank Pollard* (Jackson, MS: Franklin Printers, Inc., 2002), 177, 201–209, 219–233, 241; *The Baptist Record*, November 7, 2002, 1; December 11, 2008, 2. Pollard later moved to a retirement home in San Francisco. He was diagnosed with Parkinson’s Disease and died in 2008.
- ⁵⁷ H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 503–519; Report of the Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee to the Southern Baptist Convention, June 14, 2000; Richards, 349–350.
- ⁵⁸ *The Baptist Record*, June 8, 2000, 2; June 22, 2000, 1; July 13, 2000, 8, 9; July 20, 2000, 9.
- ⁵⁹ “Jackson church breaks tradition with woman pastor,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, January 18, 2002, 1; *The Baptist Record*, January 31, 2002, 9; February 7, 2002, 8; February 14, 2002, 9; March 7, 2002, 7; March 21, 2002, 9; March 28, 2002, 9; April 4, 2002, 9; April 25, 2002, 9; May 2, 2002, 9; May 20, 2002, 9; June 13, 2002, 9.
- ⁶⁰ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2002, 34; *The Baptist Record*, November 7, 2002, 1, 5; November 14, 2002, 9; Jim Futral, interview by author, Mendenhall, Mississippi, June 5, 2024.
- ⁶¹ *The Baptist Record*, June 14, 2014, 4; August 23, 2012, 1; June 6, 2013, 1; Jim Futral interview.
- ⁶² Busbee, 404, 406, 410, 442–443; Kidd, 324–325; *The Baptist Record*, September 1, 2005, 1; September 8, 2005, 1; September 15, 2005, 1; October 13, 2005, 3; January 5, 2006, 3; *Book of Reports*, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2005, 101; Jim Futral interview.
- ⁶³ *The Baptist Record*, September 1, 2005, 1; September 8, 2005, 1; Jim Futral interview.
- ⁶⁴ *The Baptist Record*, November 22, 2007, 1; April 17, 2008, 13; March 13, 2008, 1; July 16, 2009, 12; *Book of Reports*, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2009, 109–110.
- ⁶⁵ *The Baptist Record*, June 28, 2001, 4; September 1, 2005, 1; September 8, 2005, 5; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2006, 30–31; *The Baptist Record*, November 9, 2006, 1, 5; December 13, 2007, 1; January 22, 2009, 1. At the time of this writing, the Gulfshore Baptist Assembly property

remains unsold.

⁶⁶ *The Baptist Record*, January 31, 2008, 5.

⁶⁷ Kidd, 330; *The Baptist Record*, November 6, 2008, 1, 2; November 5, 2009, 1; November 4, 2010, 1; November 8, 2012, 1, 10; November 6, 2014, 1, 9; November 4, 2015, 1, 9, Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2021, 343.

⁶⁸ *The Baptist Record*, March 18, 1999, 3.

⁶⁹ Ibid, March 4, 1999, 3; September 6, 2001, 1; April 30, 2009, 1.

⁷⁰ Ibid, July 10, 2003, 1; July 17, 2003, 4; August 28, 2003, Special Edition, 8; “Jackson youth home hires director,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, March 17, 2004, 12; Rory Lee, telephone interview by author, June 10, 2024.

⁷¹ *The Baptist Record*, September 16, 2010, 1; Rory Lee interview.

⁷² Ibid, June 12, 2008, 1.

⁷³ Ibid, September 18, 2014, 1; October 23, 2014, 1; “Baptist Student Union at MSU celebrates ribbon-cutting,” Mississippi State University, August 24, 2016, accessed July 19, 2023, at msstate.edu/newsroom/article/2016/08/baptist-student-union-msu-celebrates-ribbon-cutting.

⁷⁴ *The Clarion-Ledger*, September 2, 2016, A8; *The Enterprise-Journal*, September 2, 2016, A2; *The Baptist Record*, May 4, 2017, 1.

⁷⁵ *The Baptist Record*, March 9, 2000, 4; March 1, 2001, 5; October 13, 2005, 1; May 26, 2011, 1; *Book of Reports*, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2000, 56; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2000, 34.

⁷⁶ *The Baptist Record*, April 18, 2013, 1; May 2, 2013, 1; *Book of Reports*, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2011, 55.

⁷⁷ *The Baptist Record*, February 7, 2002, 5; May 11, 2006, 12, August 10, 2017, 1, 10; Martin, 229–230.

⁷⁸ *The Baptist Record*, August 13, 1998, 3; March 27, 2003, 4; *Book of Reports*, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2006, 98; *The Baptist Record*, January 19, 2006, 10; February 16, 2006, 1, February 23, 2006, 3 March 30, 2006, 4, July 13, 2006, 5; September 28, 2006, 5.

⁷⁹ *The Baptist Record*, February 15, 2007, 1; 2010, 102–103; “What Is Osteopathic Medicine?” American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine, accessed July 23, 2023, at aacom.org/become-a-doctor/about-osteopathic-medicine.

⁸⁰ *The Baptist Record*, January 26, 2017, 1, 4; February 2, 2017, 1, 9; February 16, 2017, 1, 8; August 3, 2017, 1; January 25, 2018, 1, 6; “Tornado recovery ‘a community effort,’” “Teams making damage assessments,” *Hattiesburg American*, January 23, 2017, A1, 4; *Book of Reports*, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2019; William Carey University; Jim Futral interview.

⁸¹ *The Baptist Record*, August 26, 1999, 1; March 23, 2000, 4; April 30, 2015, 5; January 26, 2017, 5; Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 1995, 23–24; “Digby to Lead Christian Action Commission,” October 28, 2016, accessed July 19, 2023, at christianaction.com/digby-to-lead-christian-action-commission/.

⁸² Kidd, 334; *The Baptist Record*, September 22, 2005, 2; December 8, 2005, 8; July 9, 2015, 2.

⁸³ *The Baptist Record*, February 11, 1993, 4; September 13, 2018, 1.

⁸⁴ Ibid, September 9, 1999, 10; September 30, 1999, 9.

⁸⁵ Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2004, 36.

⁸⁶ Bradley G. Bond, *Mississippi: A Documentary History*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 297–298.

⁸⁷ *The Baptist Record*, February 1, 2001, 2; March 1, 2001, 5; March 22, 2001, 5, 6; April 5, 2002, 9,

Bond, 298.

⁸⁸ *The Baptist Record*, November 20, 2014, 8; July 9, 2015, 4; *The Enterprise-Journal* (McComb), June 26, 2016, A5.

⁸⁹ Ibid, January 16, 2003, 2; August 2, 2012, 1, 4; August 9, 2012, 1, 6. Lott was forced to step down as majority leader of the U.S. Senate, although he remained in the Senate.⁹⁰ *The Baptist Record*, October 17, 2013, 1, 9.

⁹¹ Ibid, November 4, 2004, 1; November 18, 2004, 1; November 6, 2014, 1, 9.

⁹² Minutes, Mississippi Baptist Convention, 2019; *The Baptist Record*, November 7, 2019, 1, 4, 9, Jim Futral interview.

CHAPTER 14 NOTES

¹ “2020 Events,” History Channel, December 21, 2020, accessed July 29, 2023, at [history.com/topics/21st-century/2020-events#politics-and-world-events](https://www.history.com/topics/21st-century/2020-events#politics-and-world-events); “Election challenges center on Electoral College tally,” *World*, January 5, 2021, accessed June 22, 2024, at [wng.org/articles/election-challenges-center-on-electoral-college-tally-1617296679](https://www.wng.org/articles/election-challenges-center-on-electoral-college-tally-1617296679).

² “The day mobs overran the Capitol,” *World*, January 30, 2021, accessed June 22, 2024, at [wng.org/articles/the-day-mobs-overran-the-capitol-1617296725](https://www.wng.org/articles/the-day-mobs-overran-the-capitol-1617296725).

³ “Justice, righteousness, and the gift of life: A day of victory and gratitude at the Supreme Court,” *World*, June 24, 2022, accessed June 22, 2024, at [wng.org/opinions/justice-righteousness-and-the-gift-of-life-1656092216](https://www.wng.org/opinions/justice-righteousness-and-the-gift-of-life-1656092216).

⁴ “Mississippi Baptist churches see major growth in baptism, other ministry areas,” *The Baptist Record*, May 14, 2024, accessed June 22, 2024, at thebaptistrecord.org/mississippi-baptist-churches-see-major-growth-in-baptisms-other-ministry-areas/.

⁵ “Revival breaks out at Blue Mountain Christian University,” *The Baptist Record*, March 3, 2023, accessed June 22, 2024, at thebaptistrecord.org/revival-breaks-out-at-blue-mountain-christian-university/.

⁶ *The Baptist Record*, April 4, 2013, 1, 7; January 4, 2017, 3; February 23, 2017, 1, 6; “ERLC’s Moore calls for Trump resignation,” February 4, 2021 accessed June 23, 2024, at thebaptistrecord.org/erlcs-moore-calls-for-trump-resignation/; “Departed head of Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission rips Southern Baptist Convention leadership,” June 8, 2021, accessed June 23, 2024, at thebaptistrecord.org/departed-head-of-ethics-and-religious-liberty-commission-rips-southern-baptist-convention-leadership/.

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²³ *The Baptist Record*, August 16, 2018, 1.

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Index

- Abrams, Joe, 211
Academy Baptist Church (Tippah), 126, 130, 134
African Baptist Church (Claiborne), 45-46, 66
Ahlstrom, Sydney E., 36
Allen, John, 264
Alliance Baptist Church (Harrison), 256
Alta Woods Baptist Church (Hinds), 255
Ames, Adelbert, 141-142
Ammerman, Nancy, 254
Anderson, Harold, 251
Anderson, William Henry, 74-75, 80, 103
Antioch Baptist Church (Marion), 105
Arnold, Jane, 99
Akin, Danny, 265
Atwood, Thomas, 265
Aultman, Howard, 228
Aven, Anna Ward, 177
Bailey, Thomas Jefferson, 11, 142, 151-152, 171, 184, 314
Baker, J.W., 252-253
Baker, Larry, 256
Baker, Thompson, 148
Balfour, William L., 312
Ball, Lewis, 145
Ball, Michael, 283
Banks, Edward G., 120
Banks, George G., 91
Barber, Nathan, 251
Bay Springs Baptist Church (Jasper), 295
Bay Vista Baptist Church (Harrison), 256
Bayou Pierre Baptist Church (Claiborne), 36-37, 45-46, 56, 65
Beecher, Lyman, 64
Belk, William, 32
Ben, Cyrus, 296
Besanson, L.A., 74
Bestor, Daniel P., 87, 134
Bethany Baptist Church (Lawrence), 133-134
Bethel Baptist Church (Rankin), 189
Bethel Baptist Church (Wilkinson), 37-398, 44, 51, 64, 74
Bethel Baptist Church (Yazoo), 149
Bethesda Baptist Church (Hinds), 82, 87-88, 94, 105-110, 114-117, 122-123, 126, 130
Bethlehem Baptist Church (Choctaw), 152
Biden, Joe, 292
Biggers, Neil, 273-274
Bilbo, Thodore G., 186
Blackburn, William, 265
Blessitt, Arthur, 231, 233

- Blewett, Thomas C., 86, 313
- Blue Mountain Christian University, 124, 134, 143, 178-180, 187, 193, 196, 201-202, 224, 243-244, 271, 276, 283-284, 293, 297
- Bogue Chitto Baptist Church (Pike), 45, 57
- Bond, Jean, 264
- Booth, L. Venchael, 249
- Boucher De Grand Pre, Carlos Louis, 24
- Bowen, Oscar D., 144
- Bowers, Sam, 223
- Boyd, Jesse L., 14, 50, 64, 158-59, 184, 196, 208, 211, 216, 235,
- Brady, Matt, 279
- Breazeale, W., 45
- Breckinridge, John C., 121
- Breland, Roger, 247
- Brian, Hardy, 30
- Broadmoor Baptist Church (Madison), 275
- Brogan, Richard, 235, 241-242
- Brougher, Frederick, 134
- Brown, Benjamin, 66
- Bryan, William Jennings, 181
- Bryant, Phil, 297
- Buckels, Abraham, 70
- Buckles, Matt, 287, 317
- Bucklew, Henry, 206
- Burch, John, 48, 56
- Burkett, Amy, 248
- Burns, Jeremiah, 97
- Burr, Aaron, 34
- Bush, George W., 260
- Bush, Russell, 227
- Bush, Russell Jr., 213, 316
- Byrd, Edward L., 205
- Byrd, James Edward, 169, 314
- Caldwell, S.I., 103
- Calvary Baptist Church (Hinds), 189, 225, 264, 296
- Campbell, Alexander, 58, 61-63, 98
- Campbell, Bracey, 204-205
- Campbell, Will, 209
- Canton Baptist Church (Madison), 104, 313
- Cape Fear Church, North Carolina, 44
- Carey, William, 72, 214
- Carnes, Clinton S., 174
- Carondelet, Francisco Luis Hector, 24-26, 29-31
- Carraway, Clyde C., 190
- Carson Baptist Church (Jefferson-Davis), 228
- Carter, Joseph Raborn, 170, 176
- Carter, Jimmy, 230-231
- Carter, John F., 192, 194
- Carthage Baptist Church (Leake), 219
- Cater, Thomas, 124
- Causey, William Watkins "Bill," 262-266, 268-270, 272, 275-276, 282, 316-317
- Cawthon, Richard J., 112
- Central Female Institute, See Hillman College
- Chandler, J.L., 120
- Chaney, Bailey E., 23, 30, 48-50
- Chaney, Earl, 210
- Chaney, William, 23, 30, 32, 48-49
- Chapman, Morris, 261
- Cherry Creek Baptist Church (Pontotoc), 237
- Chrestman, Michael W., 81
- Christ Temple Baptist Church (Jackson), 241
- Christian, John T., 61, 136, 155, 162, 184, 313-314
- Claiborne, J.F.H., 62
- Claiborne, C.C., 52
- Clark, Charles, 123
- Clark, Daniel, 20
- Clark, Eric, 259
- Clark, Jeff, 300
- Clark, Roy, 252
- Clarke, Nathan Lytle, 131, 179
- Clarke College, 179, 192-194, 201-202, 224, 244-245, 271, 276
- Clarksdale Baptist Church (Coahoma), 249
- Clear Creek Baptist Church (Adams), 40, 46, 63, 67-70, 74-75, 79-80, 96, 106-107, 109, 196
- Clinton, Bill, 259
- Clower, Jerry, 223-224, 231-233
- Cochran, Thad, 231, 260
- Coles Creek Church, see Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson)
- Coliseum Place Baptist Church, Louisiana, 143
- Collins, John H., 116
- Collins, M.Z., 87
- Colonial Height Baptist Church (Hinds), 255
- Compeer, Lee, 70, 84
- Compere, Lowery, 245

Connelly, Patrick, 31
 Conner, Martin, 186
 Cooper, David, 30, 37, 40, 46, 50, 52, 56-57, 62
 Cooper, Owen, 205-208, 213, 222-223, 226, 230-233, 248-250, 257, 315
 Cordill, R., 91
 Cothen, Grady C., 231
 Couch, Danny, 115
 Couch, Sarah, 108
 County Line Baptist Church (Copiah), 117-118
 Courtney, Ezra, 30, 37, 41-42, 50, 52-53
 Courtney, Hannah Curtis, 16-17
 Coward, Bettye Rogers, 283-284
 Cox, Larry, 261
 Cox, Norman W., 187-188, 199-201, 204, 206, 211
 Cox, William, 45
 Crane, William Carey, 84, 86, 90, 99-101, 138, 313
 Crawford, D.B., 80
 Creath, Jacob, 62
 Crews, William O., 233
 Criswell, W.A., 235, 253
 Crosby, Billy, 215
 Crozier, Nelson, 271
 Currie, Becky, 297
 Curtis, Benjamin, 16, 20, 36
 Curtis, Jack, 18, 26
 Curtis, Jonathan, 17
 Curtis, Patsy, 16, 32-33
 Curtis, Phoebe, 16, 29
 Curtis, Richard Jr., 12, 14-16, 18, 20-21, 23-30, 32-33, 36-37, 50-53, 74, 106, 139-140, 184, 303
 Curtis, Richard Sr., 15-16, 20
 Curtis, William, 16, 20
 Custard, Morris, 30
 Dahmer, Vernon, 233
 Darrow, Clarence, 181
 Darwin, Charles, 180
 Davis, Benjamin, 47
 Davis, Jefferson, 120, 127-129
 Dayton, A.C., 99
 De Alvo, Stephen, 21, 29
 Dean, J.H., 239
 Dean, Patricia Nash, 289
 Denson, W. Jordan- 76, 91-92, 104
 Dermaid, James- 66
 Digby, Kenny, 286
 Dobbs, Eugene, 277
 Dobbs, Gene, 262
 Dockery, H., 86
 Dossett, William, 81
 Dossey, William, 109
 Douglas, Tom, 217
 Drayton, Ebenezer, 22, 24, 25, 28
 Drummond, Lewis, 257
 Dunbar, Rick, 261-262
 Dunn, Matthew A., 124
 Eager, Eleazar Chapin, 92
 East Fork Baptist Church (Amite), 57, 209
 East Moss Point Baptist Church (Jackson), 219
 East, William, 107
 Eastland, James O., 224
 Eaton, T.T.- 162
 Ebenezer Baptist Church (Amite), 30, 37-38, 41, 44, 47, 51-53, 66, 80, 81, 94, 110, 116, 130
 Ebenezer Baptist Church (Wilkinson), 62
 Ebenezer Baptist Church, South Carolina, 12, 15, 30, 52
 Ecu Baptist Church (Pontotoc), 273
 Eddleman, H. Leo, 211
 Edwards, James W., 246, 270- 271
 Edwards, W.H., 152
 Ellicott, Andrew, 31
 Elmore, Levi, 70
 Erwin, Joseph/John, 59-61
 Eubank, Brad, 298
 Evans, William F. "Pete," 236
 Evers, Medgar, 209- 210
 Fair River Baptist Church (Lincoln), 56
 Faith Obedience Baptist Church (Harrison), 241
 Falwell, Jerry, 231
 Fannin Baptist Church (Rankin), 189
 Farish Street Baptist Church (Hinds), 242
 Farrar, William M., 91
 Fellowship Baptist Church (Jefferson), 63, 70, 74
 Fellowship Baptist Church (Jasper), 131
 Fields, Wilmer C., 211-212, 216
 Fifth Avenue Baptist Church (Forrest), 196
 Findley, H.L., 144
 Finney, Charles G., 79
 FBC Batesville (Panola), 259

FBC Bay St. Louis (Hancock), 251
 FBC Belmont (Tishomingo), 295
 FBC Biloxi (Harrison), 206, 252, 268, 273, 279, 286
 FBC Brandon (Rankin), 70, 189, 259, 312
 FBC Bude (Franklin), 251
 FBC Clinton (Hinds), 104, 130, 166, 189, 219, 260
 FBC Collinsville (Lauderdale), 293
 FBC Columbus (Lowndes), 96, 103, 107, 111, 112, 113, 114, 125, 133-134, 250, 293, 312-315
 FBC Crystal Springs (Copiah), 288, 313
 FBC Durant (Holmes), 279
 FBC Greenville (Washington), 240, 262
 FBC Grenada (Grenada), 70, 143, 149, 221, 225, 312-315
 FBC Hattiesburg (Forrest), 162, 232, 300, 314, 315
 FBC Hazlehurst (Copiah), 166, 313, 314
 FBC Holly Springs (Marshall), 237, 313
 FBC Indianola (Sunflower), 204
 FBC Jackson (Hinds), 75, 76, 104, 162, 183, 189, 203, 204, 212, 218, 221, 222, 230, 233, 248, 274, 277, 278, 300, 312-317
 FBC Laurel (Jones), 167, 187, 257, 260, 315
 FBC Leland (Washington), 212
 FBC Long Beach (Harrison), 247, 274
 FBC Louisville (Winston), 99, 175
 FBC Madison (Madison), 295
 FBC McComb (Pike), 286, 314
 FBC Meridian (Lauderdale), 188, 211, 262, 313-315
 FBC Michie, Tennessee, 293
 FBC Montgomery, Alabama, 223
 FBC Natchez (Baptist), 74, 75, 85, 163, 188, 313-315
 FBC New Albany (Union), 201, 236, 315
 FBC New Augusta (Perry), 295
 FBC New Orleans, Louisiana, 104
 FBC Ocean Springs (Jackson), 139, 219, 224, 225
 FBC Sharon (Jones), 271
 FBC Oxford (Lafayette), 206, 265, 279, 288, 313, 314
 FBC Pascagoula (Jackson), 260
 FBC Philadelphia (Neshoba), 198, 315
 FBC Picayune (Pearl River)- 196
 FBC Pontotoc (Pontotoc), 190
 FBC Richton (Perry), 264
 FBC Saltillo (Lee), 295
 FBC Tupelo (Lee), 186, 261, 314, 315
 FBC Vicksburg (Warren), 104, 122, 136, 261, 314
 FBC Water Valley (Yalobusha), 239, 314, 315
 FBC Yazoo City (Yazoo), 211, 223, 230, 232, 295, 314
 FBC Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 145
 FBC Memphis, Tennessee, 156
 FBC Nashville, Tennessee, 98
 Fisher, Harold, 244, 271, 283
 Fitz, Gideon, 89
 Flake, Arthur, 166, 197, 169
 Flowers, Elisha, 56
 Flowers, Josiah, 45
 Folsom, Peter, 148
 Foote, Henry, 85
 Ford, Gerald, 257
 Ford, Thomas, 90
 Fort Bayou Baptist Church (Jackson), 252
 Fortinberry, William, 107
 Foster, Lovelace S., 150, 170, 184
 Francis, Rossie, 241
 Freeman, John T., 99, 101, 151, 313
 Freeman, T.G., 103
 Friendship Baptist Church (Lawrence), 105
 Frost, James M., 146, 147
 Fuller, Richard, 99
 Furman, Richard, 57
 Futral, James R. "Jim," 236, 239, 275-277, 279-283, 286-288, 290, 293, 316-317
 Galilee Baptist Church (Amite), 159-160
 Gambrell, James Bruton, 134, 137, 142, 144, 146-148, 151, 153-155, 158, 166, 237, 313
 Gambrell, Roderic D., 142
 Garnet, James, 40
 Gates, Lewis Gee, 192, 193, 315
 Gayoso de Lemos, Don Manuel, 22-25, 31, 32
 Gibson, Billy, 148
 Gilfoy, Karenza, 202
 Gipson, Andy, 297
 Goodman, Andrew, 210
 Goodrich, A.L., 190, 196, 206, 216, 221
 Goodwater Baptist Church (Smith), 191

Goodwin, S., 45
 Graham, Billy, 209
 Granberry, LoAmmi, 82
 Granberry, Moses, 101
 Granberry, N.R., 70
 Granberry, S.S., 134, 135
 Grand Gulf Baptist Church (Claiborne), 96
 Grant, Ulysses S., 121-123, 126, 129
 Grantham, T.P., 190
 Graves Creek Baptist Church (Marion), 105
 Graves, James R., 98, 99, 151, 163
 Gray, Baron DeKalb, 166, 174
 Gray, L. Lavon, 203
 Green, Peter A., 116
 Green, R.G., 70, 311
 Greene, Nathanael, 15
 Greenleaf, David, 23, 24, 29
 Grenada Baptist Church (Grenada), 70, 143, 221, 225
 Gressett, A., 151
 Griffin Memorial Baptist Church (Hinds), 198
 Guion, Isaac, 32
 Gum Springs Baptist Church (Simpson), 297
 Gunn, Frank, 252, 268, 279, 286, 316
 Gunn, Philip, 260, 262
 Gunn, Sandra, 278
 Gunnison Baptist Church (Bolivar), 221
 Gunter, Richard Baker (R.B.), 166, 168, 174- 176, 191-198, 205, 314-315
 Guy, Donnie, 255
 Hackett, J.A., 137-140
 Haddick, Hiram T., 143
 Hadley, Moses, 44, 50-52
 Haggan, Dolton, 242
 Haggan, Martha, 242
 Half Moon Baptist Church, Washington Parish, Louisiana, 53
 Hall, Catherine, 89
 Hall, Dan C., 217, 247
 Hall, Leonidas Edwin, 144
 Hamberlin, John B., 139, 144
 Hamberlin, William, 21, 29
 Hamer, Fannie Lou, 210
 Hamilton, Eddie, 268, 316
 Hamlet, Charles Buck, III, 211, 235
 Hankins, Eric, 279
 Hannan, Barton, 23, 32
 Harbor Baptist Church (Rankin), 252
 Hardy, William Harris, 135, 139, 143, 152-155, 157, 158, 313
 Harigail, 23, 30
 Harmon, Hezekiah, 45
 Harmony Baptist Church (Copiah), 117
 Harrell, Paul, 238
 Harris, J. Gerald, 255
 Harris, S.L., 245
 Harrison, Isham Jr., 100
 Harrison, Luther A., 203
 Harrison, Mrytle, 203
 Haworth, D. Swan, 205, 207
 Hayes, Rutherford B., 141
 Haygood, E.L., 81
 Hayward, 84
 Hearn, S.L., 180
 Helms, Jesse, 256
 Henderson, Guy, 263-265, 269
 Henry, Aaron, 210
 Hephzibah Baptist Church (Clarke), 82
 Hepzibah Baptist Church (Lawrence), 70, 312
 Hepzibah Baptist Church, East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, 53
 Herdahl, Lisa, 273
 Herring, Percy F., 272
 Herrings, Benjamin, 106
 Hewitt, Purser, 213, 315
 Hewitt, W.A., 189
 Hickok, Lorena, 186
 Hickory Flat Baptist Church (Benton), 276
 Highland Baptist Church (Jones), 265
 Hillman College (CFI), 93, 122, 136, 146, 178, 180, 202
 Hillman, Adelia, 93, 122, 146, 184
 Hillman, Walter, 93, 136, 146, 157
 Hinds, Thomas, 55
 Hinton, Isaac T., 103-104
 Hodge, Grover Cleveland, 206, 207
 Holcomb, T. Luther, 187, 188
 Holcome, 84
 Hollingsworth, W., 116
 Holloway, Lewis B., 70, 75, 77, 311, 312

Holman, Russell, 87
 Holmes, David, 35
 Holt, Chloe, 29
 Homer, 92
 Honeycutt, Roy Lee, 231-232, 235
 Hopewell Baptist Church (Lafayette), 82, 97, 99,
 108, 110, 115, 126
 Horace, 92
 Horton, Jerry L., 273
 Howell, R.B.C., 98- 99
 Hudgins, W. Douglas, 211-212, 218, 221, 226,
 233-237, 316
 Hudson, Angela, 270
 Hudson, Bill, 270
 Hudson, Winthrop, 79
 Hulbert, T.L., 152
 Humes, H.H., 221
 Humphries, Allen, 97
 Hunter, John F., 171
 Hurt, W.A., 151
 Hurt, Richard, 244
 Iglesia Internacional de Las Americas in
 Carthage, 288
 Rice, Joel D., 218
 Jackson, Andrew, 35, 54, 55
 Jackson, Indian, 148
 Jackson, Vermester, 225
 Jacobs, H.P., 132
 Jefferson, Thomas, 34
 Jennings, A.E., 180
 Jennings, Z.D., 177
 Jerusalem Baptist Church (Hinds), 130
 Johnson, Hickman, 242
 Johnson, Isham, 148
 Johnson, J.L., 137, 170
 Johnson, John L. Jr., 179
 Johnson, Richard, 49
 Jones, John, 47
 Johnson, Sue Bell, 214-215
 Jones, John Griffing, 15-21, 303
 Jones, Paul, 16, 20, 65, 184
 Jones, Paul Griffin, 272
 Jones, Phoebe, 23
 Judson, Adoniram, 73, 77
 Kaneubbe, Victor M., 10, 13
 Kay, Anthony, 161, 163, 205, 223, 225-227, 235-
 238, 240-243, 256
 Kelly, Earl, 161, 163, 205, 223, 225-227, 235-238,
 240-243, 256-257, 262, 264, 314
 Kennedy, John F., 209- 210
 Kennedy, Larry, 271, 284-285
 Kidd, Thomas S., 164
 King, 84
 King, Eustace Eugene, 137
 King, Martin Luther Jr., 209, 211, 223
 King, R. Thomas "Tommy", 281, 285, 286, 297
 King, T.S.N., 70
 Knight, Newton, 123
 Kossuth Baptist Church (Alcorn), 124
 Lackey, Margaret McRae, 170, 173, 176, 197, 198
 Lacy, Ruth, 271
 Landrum, John W., 205, 273
 Landrum, Tom, 223
 Lane, J.H., 159-162
 Lang, Herbert L., 204, 214
 Lanier, Ealiff, 20, 30
 Lanier, John, 30
 Lattimore, Samuel S., 70, 76, 77
 Lattimore, Walter Compere, 145
 Laurel Baptist Church (Jones), 165
 Lawrence, John Benjamin, 166, 168, 171-174,
 187, 205
 Leavell, Landrum P., 166- 167, 187, 188, 231
 Leavell, Landrum P. II, 231
 Leavell, R.M., 156
 Leavell, Roland Q., 187, 231
 Leavell, Z.T., 11, 156, 184,
 Lww, J.W., 194
 Lee, Michael, 296
 Lee, Robert E., 120, 123, 129
 Lee, Rory, 267, 270, 271, 282-283
 Lincoln, Abraham, 119, 127-129
 Line Creek Baptist Church (Scott), 123
 Linn Baptist Church (Sunflower), 198
 Lipsey, Plautus Iberus, 171-172, 315
 Lomax, A.A., 137, 158, 314
 Lomay, Alexander A., 124
 Longino, A.H., 183, 314
 Loreda, Ignacio, 243
 Lott, Trent, 260, 288

Love, M.P., 193, 314-315
 Lowrey, B.G., 314
 Lowrey, Lawrence T., 180, 315
 Lowrey, Mark Perrin, 124-125, 134, 136, 145, 151, 179- 180
 Lowrey, William Tyndale, 134, 150, 177-179, 192
 Lucedale Baptist Church (George), 183
 M'Gill, Franklin, 70
 MacGorman, J.W., 248
 MacImore, Leuizer, 66
 Madison, James, 35, 48
 Magee, Calvin, 107
 Mallet, G.W., 153
 Manly, Basil, 110
 Marion, Francis, 15
 Marks Baptist Church (Quitman), 204
 Mars Hill Baptist Church (Amite), 62
 Marsh, S., 45
 Martin, Francis, 109
 Martin, Greg, 261
 Martin, J.T., 116
 Martin, M. Thomas, 135-136, 144, 151, 159-162
 Martin, Thomas T., 181
 Martin, Tom, 265
 Martin, Tony, 295
 Massey, B.E., 176
 Massey, R.A., 144
 Matthews, William E., 62
 Matthews, David, 241
 Matthews, Mrs. J.Z., 153
 McBeth, Leon, 98
 McCall, Daniel, 49, 56
 McCall, Druie Anselm, 198-208, 211-213, 315
 McCall, Duke K., 211, 232
 McCall, Geraldine, 206
 McCall, John, 228, 316
 McCoy, Isaac, 97
 McCullers, Matthew, 30
 McDaniel, George W., 182
 McGregor, Don, 240, 256, 226
 McGregor, Kermit, 235
 McHenry Baptist Church (Stone), 165
 McKeigney, Alex, 221
 McLemore, Richard Aubrey, 12, 220, 226, 235
 McMillin, Barbara, 284, 297
 McWilliams, Anne, 263
 Meadows, W.L., 213
 Meadowview Baptist Church (Oktibbeha), 276
 Medina, Joel, 288
 Melton, Charles H. Jr., 244
 Mercer, Thomas, 47, 50-52
 Meredith, James, 210
 Metzner, Kurt, 265
 Michel, David, 277
 Micou, J., 84
 Middleton Baptist Church (Carroll), 70
 Middleton, John, 107
 Middleton, R.D., 152
 Midnight Baptist Church (Humphreys), 190
 Miller, E.D., 137
 Miller, Edmund Boston, 144
 Minter, 84
 Mississippi College, 89-94, 99, 103-104, 120-21, 123, 134-136, 143-146, 153-59, 166, 177-78, 188, 190, 193, 201-202, 216, 222, 224, 226-228, 233-235, 244-245, 256-257, 261-262, 265-270, 275, 282-284, 296-297
 Mitchell, Mrs. A.L., 149
 Mitchell, S.C., 156
 Mohler, Al, 265
 Moody, D.L., 170
 Moon, Lottie, 149, 275
 Moore, A.F., 143
 Moore, Amzie, 210
 Moore, Charles, 130
 Moore, Riley, 47
 Moore, Russell, 293
 Moore. Heather, 10, 13
 Morgan, William, 65
 Morrison Heights Baptist Church (Hinds), 260
 Mosely, Benjamin, 30
 Moses, Charles, 47
 Moss Point Baptist Church (Jackson), 139
 Moulder, Daniel Wesley, 190-191
 Mound Bluff Baptist Church (Madison), 70
 Mount Moriah Baptist Church (Wilkinson), 62
 Mount Zion Baptist Church (Franklin), 117
 Mulkey, Turney, 31
 Mullins, Edgar Young, 166-167, 182
 Mullins, Elijah, 126

Musgrove, Ronnie, 259, 287
 Natchez Baptist Church (Adams), 74-75, 103
 Nelson, Arthur L., 234
 Nelson, Billy Ray, 219-220
 Nelson, Dotson McGinnis, 222
 Nelson, Lena, 167
 Nelson, Martha, 241
 Nelson, Mrs. M.H., 145
 New Fellowship Baptist Church (Jasper), 195-196
 New Hope Baptist Church (Adams), 37, 51, 59, 74
 New Hope Baptist Church (Amite), 131
 New Providence Baptist Church (Amite), 37, 52
 Newman, A.H., 162
 Nichols, D.A., 111
 Nichols, Henry, 65
 Nichols, William, 114
 Nixon, Richard, 230
 Nobles, Lewis, 228, 245, 266-267, 271
 Noonkester, J. Ralph, 225, 246
 Norris, J. Frank, 181-182
 Norris, Samuel, 222
 North Oxford Baptist Church (Lafayette)- 267
 Northminster Baptist Church (Hinds), 255, 260, 279
 Nunnery, Dorothy, 239
 Nunnery, Paul N., 239
 Odle, Joe T., 206, 216, 228, 240
 Ogden, Daniel, 16
 Ogden, William, 16
 Olander, C.J., 189
 Orr, Jennings, 262
 Otis, Larry, 264
 Owen, William, 23
 Page, Frank, 279
 Palestine Baptist Church (Hinds), 70
 Parker, Daniel, 58
 Parker, J.C., 171
 Parker, Shawn, 293-300
 Parkway Baptist Church (Hinds), 262
 Particular Baptist Church, New York, 68
 Patterson, Marjean, 235, 282
 Patterson, Paige, 253, 265, 298
 Paul Truitt Memorial Baptist Church (Rankin), 218
 Paynter, Suzii, 264
 Pemberton, John C., 121-122
 Pendleton, J.M., 98-99
 Perkins, Joseph, 36
 Perkins, Nathaniel, 56
 Perkins, William H. "Dusty," 265, 286, 288, 295
 Perry, David, 220
 Pettus, John H., 119
 Pheba Baptist Church (Clay)-, 276
 Phillips, M.W., 91
 Pickering, Charles, 231, 233, 257-258, 260
 Pierce, Alton Bryan, 201
 Piker, Leander S., 145
 Pinelake Church (Rankin), 300
 Pisgah Baptist Church (Rankin), 189
 Poindexter, George, 55
 Pollard, Frank, 231, 233, 257, 277
 Poole, Chuck, 279
 Pope, Percy Smith, 31
 Poplar Springs Drive Baptist Church Meridian (Lauderdale), 262
 Popp's Ferry Baptist Church (Harrison), 273
 Porter, Jimmy, 286, 290
 Pressler, Paul, 253, 256
 Price, Cader, 120
 Providence Baptist Church (Forrest), 56, 64-66, 80-81, 105, 107, 114, 116
 Provine, John William, 178, 181, 183
 Purser, David Ingram, 144
 Purser, Frank Moody, 206-207
 Purser, John F., 144
 Quarles, Chester Lew, 212-214, 216-218, 233-234
 Raikes, Roberts, 78
 Ranaldson, James A., 46, 62-63
 Rankin, Jerry, 232, 261
 Ratliff, William T., 29, 158
 Rayburn, M.F., 213
 Reagan, Ronald, 231, 257
 Reaves, Zachariah, 80
 Red Creek Baptist Church (Harrison), 102
 Reedy, Millard Guy, 239
 Reeves, James A., 83
 Reeves, Tate, 295
 Reeves, Zachariah, 80, 133
 Register, Dean- 255

Reynolds, Isham Emmanuel, 170
 Ridgecrest Baptist Church (Hinds), 237
 Ripley Baptist Church (Tippah), 124
 Riser, Isaac, 105
 Riser, Mary, 105
 Rivercrest Fellowship Church (Rankin), 278-279
 Rivers, W.W., 178
 Riverside Baptist Church (Lawrence), 252
 Robertson, Norvell Jr., 133
 Robertson, Norvell Sr., 56,73
 Robinson, Alice, 89
 Robinson, Andrew, 288
 Robinson, Edwina, 202, 205, 235
 Robinson, Raymond, 89
 Robinson, Ronny, 282
 Rockefeller, John D., 177
 Rocky Creek Baptist Church (George), 195
 Rogers, Adrian, 231, 249, 253-254, 283
 Roosevelt, Franklin D., 186
 Rose Hill Baptist Church (Adams), 104
 Rouse, Irving E., 214-215
 Rowe, Abner Vernon, 155, 168, 171
 Royce, Lee G., 284
 Runnels, Hiram G., 75, 89
 Runnels, Obedience, Smith, 75
 Ryan, Elizabeth, 30
 Salem Baptist Church (Jefferson), 20, 23, 30, 32, 36-38, 40, 44, 48-53, 56, 66, 68, 140, 197, 283, 301
 Sample, John Richard, 162
 Sanford, Janie L., 145
 Sankey, Ira, 170
 Sansing, Gordon, 268
 Sarepta Baptist Church (Franklin), 44, 63, 65, 71, 106-110, 115-116, 123-124, 126, 131
 Scarborough, Jane, 65
 Scarborough, Lawrence, 44, 56, 65
 Schilling, Bess Eva, 205-206
 Schilling, Theodore C., 161
 Schwerner, Michael Henry, 210
 Scopes, John, 181-182
 Screven, William, 14
 Searcy, James B., 152
 Second Baptist Church (Lafayette), 288
 Sellers, T.G., 131
 Sellers, Walter, 44
 Sexton, S.W., 76
 Shands, Harley P., 171
 Shelton, David, 158
 Sherman, William T., 121-122, 125-127
 Shiloh Baptist Church (Wilkinson), 52
 Shirley, Barri A., 262, 277, 296
 Sibly, S.W., 163
 Sieg, F.F., 77
 Silver Creek Baptist Church (Lawrence), 117
 Silver Creek Baptist Church (Pike), 82, 105
 Simmons, Eugene, 255
 Simmons, Frank Jr., 239, 281
 Simmons, James, 65
 Sims, Tom, 264
 Skillings, Otis, 247
 Smith, Bill, 277
 Smith, Graham, 274-275
 Smith, John Bryant, 206
 Smith, John, 56
 Smith, Linda, 296
 Smith, Seburn, 148
 Smyth, John, 14
 Snodgrass, David, 40
 Snodgrass, William, 46
 Solomon, J.S., 157
 Spangle Banner Baptist Church (Bolivar), 288
 Sparks, Randy J., 228
 Springhill Freewill Baptist Church (Amite), 274
 Sproles, Henry Franklin, 149, 158
 St. Bride's Church. London, England, 114
 Stagg, Evelyn, 255
 Stagg, Frank, 255
 Stampley, Jacob, 20, 36, 49
 Stampley, John, 20, 36
 Stampley, Margaret, 20
 Stampley, Phoebe Curtis, 16
 Stanley, Charles, 231
 Stiteler, J.B., 91
 Stone, Barton W., 62
 Stone, John M., 142
 Stone, Lewis Maxwell, 150, 158
 Stone, Steve, 277
 Straight Bayou Baptist Church (Sharkey), 190
 Street, Carla, 278

Street, Steve, 278
 Strum, M. Kent, 265
 Sturdivant, Charles, 148
 Sullivan, James L., 211, 231, 239, 248
 Sullivan, William A., 188
 Sumrall, Robbie Neal, 124
 Sweatt, Lloyd, 298
 Sykes, Johnny, 270
 Tarrant, Carter, 46, 82
 Tate, Andy, 46, 82
 Tatum, W.S.F., 178
 Taylor, James B., 86
 Taylor, John, 58
 Taylor, Nell, 202
 Taylor, W.H., 76, 91
 Taylor, W.N., 193-194
 Teasdale, Thomas C., 107, 111, 125, 127-128, 133
 Temple Baptist Church (Lamar), 196, 295
 Thames, William I., 178
 Thaxton Church (Pontotoc), 219
 Thigpen, M.J., 120
 Thomas, Benjamin, 148
 Thomas, William, 36
 Thomason, John, 255
 Thompson, Blake, 284, 296
 Thompson, H.H., 124
 Thompson, Levi, 45
 Thompson, Lewis W., 91
 Thompson, W.E., 192
 Thompson, William, 20-21, 36
 Thurmond, Strom, 288
 Tichenor, I.T., 146
 Tocshish Baptist Church (Pontotoc), 70
 Todd, Howell, 267, 269, 284
 Townsend, Claude, 213
 Townsend, Paul, 207
 Traylor, Fannie, 197
 Trinity Baptist Church (Harrison), 219
 Truett, George W., 187
 Trump, Donald, 292
 Tubb, Grayton, 248
 Tucker, G., 86
 Turner, Nat, 81
 Turner, Will, 190
 Tuten, Joe H., 225
 Tyler, D.A., 110-111
 Tyler, Frances Landrum, 187
 Tyler, Wilfred Charles, 187
 Tynes, Walter Edwin, 144
 Union Baptist Church (Panola), 195
 Unity Church (Greene), 220
 University Baptist Church (Forrest), 228, 250
 Urner, Isaac Newton, 121
 Utica Baptist Church (Hinds), 117
 Vall, Les De, 215
 Van Osdel, O.W., 149
 Van Winkle Baptist Church (Hinds), 255
 Vaughn, Ashley, 63, 66-67, 70, 74, 77, 103
 Vaught, Chester, 262
 Vedder, Henry C., 162
 Venable, Robert A., 156
 Venture Church (Lamar), 300
 Vickery, Harry, 240, 267, 269
 Vicksburg Baptist Church (Warren), 104, 122, 136
 Wahalak Baptist Church (Kemper), 70
 Walker, Jimmy, 245
 Wall Street Baptist (Adams), 103
 Waller, Bill, 230
 Walne, Thomas Jefferson, 132, 136, 144
 Ward, Frederick, 126
 Ward, James, 127
 Ward, W.J., 246
 Waterbury, Maria, 133
 Weathersby, Ken, 261
 Webb, Warren Sheldon, 156
 Weeks, Michael W., 261
 Weeks, Randy, 247
 Welborn, J.W., 120
 Wells Creek Baptist Church (Franklin), 62
 Welsh Neck Baptist Church, Society Hill, SC, 15
 West Jackson Baptist Church (Hinds), 218-219
 West Laurel Baptist Church (Jones), 265
 West Troy NY, 68
 West, Ken, 221
 Wester, Brooks, 231-232
 Wharton, George, 146
 Wheeler, Donna Duck, 214
 Whieldon, William, 75
 White Oak Baptist Church (Copiah), 117-118

White, Annie Davidson, 134
 White, Hugh, 186, 221
 Whitehead, R.H., 137
 Whitfield, Benjamin, 70, 76-77, 82, 90-93, 134-136, 139
 Whitney, Eli, 35
 Whitsitt, William, 162-163
 Whittington William M., 200
 Wicker, Roger, 273
 Wilbanks, Charles, 244, 266
 Wilkins, Thomas, 20
 Willard, Frances E., 142
 William Carey University, 179, 214-215, 224-226, 228, 245-246, 269-270, 280-282, 284-286, 297
 Williams, Alexander, 66
 Williams, D.O., 91
 Williams, E.C., 215
 Williams, Evelyn, 244
 Williams, Linda, 225
 Williams, Roger, 14
 Willis, Allen, 148
 Willis, Joseph, 44
 Wilson, Dudley, 228
 Wilson, N.W., 143
 Wilson, Woodrow, 173
 Winter, William, 231, 250, 287
 Wood, E.L., 75
 Wood, John, 40
 Woodall, Jesse, 106-107
 Woods, Mrs. W.R., 169
 Woodson, Samuel Relda, 227
 Woodville Baptist Church (Wilkinson), 38, 55, 64, 74, 112-113,
 Woodville Heights Baptist Church (Hinds), 222-223, 249
 Work, George, 75
 Worthington, Cary F., 265
 Wren, Christopher, 114
 Yancey, Rex, 268
 York, J.H., 120
 Young, Ed, 261
 Young, Larry, 288-289
 Young, Thomas Wiley, 199
 Zion Hill Baptist Church (Amite), 45, 52, 161



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